

# Whispers of Hope

**A Mother's Resilience  
Rewritten**

Agnes Nyangi

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To my loving husband, and my beloved children, your unwavering support and encouragement have been my strength throughout this journey. You are my greatest treasure and a constant source of inspiration. I love you deeply.



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# Introduction

In the quiet corners of my past, where shadows danced with the echoes of despair, I discovered the unwritten chapters of resilience and the unwavering strength that emerges from the trials of life. This is my story—a tapestry woven with threads of tears, determination and the firm belief that one can rewrite their destiny, no matter how dark the night may seem.

I invite you to join me on a journey, a tour through the triumphs, trials and tribulations of a life that dared to defy the whispers of hopelessness. This book documents a living testimony of the indomitable spirit that resides within each one of us—a spark waiting to set on fire our wildest dreams, those dreams we believe to be too far beyond our reach.

As the sun painted the sky in varieties of uncertainties, I stood at the cliff of a life haunted by the absence of love and support. The father of my two precious ones, like a fleeting shadow, left us to navigate the labyrinth of hardship. Mornings dawned with empty stomachs and echoed with the cries of hungry hearts—mine intertwined with the innocent wails of my children. In those moments, tears were our shared language, a masterpiece of despair that underscored the dire need for change.

So, with a heart heavy filled with determination and the weight of responsibility, I made a choice—a choice to return to my roots, to my parents' home, where the love and strength of family would serve as the compass guiding my journey towards renewal.

The city lights of Mwanza gestured with promises of opportunity, and with a resilient spirit as my guide, I embarked on a path illuminated by the flickering flame of hope. A waitress to a student, I juggled plates and dreams, laboring not only for sustenance but also for the knowledge that would be the foundation of a transformation yet to unfold.

From working in the field secretarial services to conquering the

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challenges that came with academic exams—during my secondary school years, form two, form four, form six—I wove my narrative through my pursuit of education, each accomplishment a stitch in the fabric of my aspirations. A diploma in human resources, a degree in sociology, a postgraduate diploma in project management and finally, a master's degree in gender studies. To me, these were not merely awards, but rather steppingstones, each leading me closer to the pinnacle of my aspirations.

In my quest for survival, I traded bananas, sweet potatoes, second-hand bedsheets and men's shirts. The journey was without doubt demanding, the path covered with millions of obstacles, but with an unwavering spirit, I carved a way forward—a proof to the profound truth that, even amidst adversity, one can rewrite their destiny.

This book is more than a recount of personal accomplishments; it is a bridge connecting my journey from the humble origins of my childhood in a small Tanzanian village to the skyscrapers of my ambitions. My life entwined with the presence of my siblings, the console of our grandma, and the love of my mother and other relatives—all who played a vital part in the complex journey of my becoming.

Penned in this book is a testimony to the transformative power of perseverance and faith. My prayer, whispered in the quiet moments of uncertainty, was for guidance, not just for myself, but to become a beacon for souls who are looking to find inspiration in order to figure their way out of the depths of despair.

Beyond the borders of my homeland, where dreams know no bounds, I stand today—a mother, a scholar, a survivor and an architect of my destiny. I gift this book to you, a reflection of the belief that, no matter where you are in life, you can always start over, and against all odds, you can achieve your dreams. Welcome to the pages of my life, where tears became the ink, and resilience, the pen that inscribed the Whispers of Hope for your life.



# **Chapter One**

## **A Leap of Faith**

### **Reclaiming Hope**

As I embarked on my journey of career and education, I carried with me a solemn promise, a promise to become a testament for young women who may be looking to find their way out of the depths of despair I knew that through prayer and faith, I could manifest my dreams and become a beacon of hope to others. Remember, dear reader, that God has the power to take you from the depths of despair to the pinnacle of success.

As a young mother in my early 20s, every day felt like an uphill battle. The challenges before me seemed insurmountable. I shared my life with the father of my two children, but he had forsaken us, leaving us stranded with neither support nor hope. Armed with only a primary school education, I found myself in a dire predicament — no job, no business and no financial resources. The extremity of our situation cast a shadow over my days.

The memory of those challenging times remains etched in my mind.

He would vanish for two or three weeks, a ghost leaving without a trace, and I was left alone to navigate the complexities of life with our 1-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter. The cruelty of those moments manifested in the absence of a single penny to buy food. It was a stark reality I faced every waking day, trying to make ends meet in the unforgiving severity of our circumstances.

Even when he returned, his homecomings were marked with emptiness. His hands, once capable of providing, now hung empty by his sides. His presence became a fleeting pause, a transient visit solely to change clothes before vanishing into the abyss once more. The echoes of his departures rang through the emptiness of our home, leaving me to confront the harshness of life alone, battling with the weight of responsibility and the silent cries of my children.

In the quiet desperation of those mornings where we had nothing to eat, the weight of responsibility hung like a heavy fog, settling over our small world. My children, innocent beings in a world unkind, gazed up at me with eyes that bore both trust and desperation. My son, a mere toddler, would tug at my clothes, his eyes imploring me to conjure miracles out of thin air.

Unable to articulate his hunger in words, he would guide me to the charcoal cooking stove with a persistent pull. In his young mind, the routine of waking up to the comforting aroma of food was disrupted, and it didn't make sense to him. He would fix his gaze on me, his small finger pointing at the cooking pots, his eyes welling up with tears. His silent cries swept away the innocence lost in the sparse reality of our empty kitchen.

Beside him stood my daughter, wise beyond her years. Her brave smile attempted to mask the hunger gnawing at her, but her eyes betrayed the fear that crept under the surface. As their cries filled the silence of our small house, I found myself powerless in the face of their anguish.

There, in that shared moment of despair, we three became a symphony of tears. Helplessly, I watched them cry, their hungry tears haunting the corners of our small space. Unable to do anything to ease their

pain, I too, joined the chorus of tears. The uncertainty of whether we could secure any food for the day loomed over us, casting a shadow on our shared vulnerability. In that touching scene of sorrow, we clung to each other, bound by a hunger that transcended the physical and touched the depths of our souls.

In those moments, I felt the inadequacy of my education like a scarlet letter, branding me with the limitations society deemed fit to impose. The empty belly cries of my children served as a haunting melody, a symphony of despair that played on the distressed strings of my maternal heart.

The room we stood in seemed even smaller, suffocating under the weight of broken promises and shattered dreams. The emptiness of our stove mirrored the emptiness of his hands and the void in his countenance. As I stood in the center of our humble home, pondering over why the man I had trusted enough to build a life with in the first place, the father of my two precious children, thought we deserved such treatment. Right then and there, I knew that something had to change.

The turning point was not a grand revelation, but rather a quiet resolve that sprung up from the depths of my despair. I couldn't change the past or the choices he made, but what I could do was make the choice to shape the future for the sake of my children. In the simplicity of that realization, a flicker of determination ignited within me.

Little by little, with the support of some friends, and the strength drawn from the depths of maternal love, we began to rebuild. The room that once confined us became a nest from which we emerged, not unharmed, but resilient. To this day, the resonance of those hungry cries still lingers in the recesses of my memory, a reminder of the battles fought, and the victories earned in the pursuit of a brighter tomorrow.

Today, as I stand on the far side of that turbulent chapter, I carry with me the scars of those hardships with a grace born of survival. The space we were once bound in now stands as a testament to the

transformative power of a mother's love, and alongside it the indomitable spirit that can emerge from the darkest corners of misery.

In the tangle of depression, where each day unclear into the next, the kindness of neighbors surged as a signal of light, cutting through the darkness that threatened to consume us. Their gestures, simple yet profound, were the threads that created a safety net under the fragile tightrope we walked on.

My neighbors, in their own ways, became our heroes. With hearts attuned to our silent cries of desperation, they would slip away unnoticed, returning with bags of food that bred hope. Bread, sugar, flour – these were not just mere food items; they were the alchemy that transformed hunger into a momentary reprieve. With a bit of money they offered us, a lifeline that stretched beyond the tangible, they unknowingly bridged the void of uncertainty that cracked beneath our feet.

In the sanctuary of their generosity, our hearts found comfort, and the weight of hunger momentarily lifted. It was a reminder that compassion, in its quietest form, possesses a transformative power that transcends the boundaries of circumstance.

And then, like the fade and flow of a persistent tide, the father of my children would reappear, a specter of anguish and conflict. His return brought neither relief nor joy; instead, it deepened the wounds of abandonment. He moved through our lives like a ghost, passing by in the periphery of our struggles, offering neither comfort nor solace. It was as if the life he had promised us before meant nothing to him anymore, and in all honesty, it hurt to witness how much the man I loved no longer existed in him.

The joyous rush of our children towards him, hopeful and hungry for paternal warmth, met a wall of cold rejection. His words, a storm of cruelty, tore through the delicate fabric of our endurance.

The children, eager for a father's embrace, were met with vicious dismissal. His spite for our existence manifested in the harsh

instructions for them to keep their distance. In those moments, as he turned to me with eyes that held no spark of regret in them, the extremity of his words battered the already weathered walls of my resolve.

In the harshness of his words, each sentence bore the weight of cruelty. His return, a repeated torment, transformed our home into a battleground where the declaration of his disregard for neither I nor our two innocent children resonated against the brittle walls of our resilience.

As he confronted me with bitter interrogations. His words lashed out like a whip, cutting through thin air, leaving wounds that worsened in the silence that followed. "Why do you keep forcing to stay with me!?" he would demand, as if my presence, together with that of our children, was an imposition, a burden he could no longer bear.

My attempt to uphold the impaired relationship between us faced cold-hearted dismissal. "I understand that you don't need me anymore", I would express, my voice a blend of desperation and rebellion, "but what about your children?" His response, a chilling disclosure, starkly reflected the lovelessness for us that had firmly taken root in his heart. This reality ran parallel to that of our hungry, hopeful children clinging to my side. He heartlessly explained, "If you're unwilling to be with them," he sneered, "just abandon them on the street. I don't need them!" His words, dripping with poison, lingered in the air, tainting the innocence that, up until that precise moment, still dwelled in their innocent eyes.

The agony reached its climax when he declared, with a chilling conclusiveness, that even in his death, our presence was unwelcome. "Don't come to my funeral!" he seethed. The bitterness in his voice left no room for misinterpretation. "I don't need you, and I don't need your children!"

In the haze of his rejection, our children, innocent witnesses to this painful exchange, clung to me as if seeking refuge from a storm. Like tiny sparrow chicks, they huddled beneath their mother's protective

wings during the jungle monsoon. His insistence on keeping them at arm's length, a sheer reminder that we were unwanted passengers in the journey of his life, only deepened the wounds inflicted by his words.

As he left, storming out as abruptly as he arrived, our home became a hollow sanctuary where his absence crept louder than his fading footsteps. The silence that followed held the weight of shattered dreams and fractured hopes.

In those moments, I became a bearer of wounds, not just my own, but also of those engraved into the hearts of my children. Yet, within the deafening silence of his departure, a quiet resolve took root. That the toxicity of his rejection would no longer define our worth. The journey ahead, though uncertain, held the promise of liberation from the chains of love unrequited.

As the father of my children faded into the horizon, his words remained engraved into the narrative of our shared history, I had no better choice than to stay resilient, vowing to shield my children from the upheaval that had just raged in our fragile haven. Following his departure, the journey towards a new dawn began, fueled by the undying flame of a mother's love and the silent promise that our worth would no longer be defined by his disregard.

In the darkness of those nights, I grappled not only with the burden of survival for me and my children, but also with the weight of a love that had turned into a toxic brew.

Amidst the unyielding hardships with the father of my children, I embarked on a journey to seek familial intervention. First, I approached his elder brother, laying bare the struggles that had become the unwelcomed guests in our home. He assured me of his support, promising to come and address the unraveling situation, but before I knew it, days stretched into nights, yet his words remained suspended in the air, a promise rather unfulfilled.

Undiscouraged, I turned to his younger brother, recounting the

unsuccessful plea with the elder sibling. The desperation in my voice carried the weight of my children's uncertain future. Once again, assurances were given, but like a mirage, the brother's presence never materialized. In spite all the disappointments I had to endure; my resolve remained unbroken.

Following the lack of viable support from the two brothers, I settled on a different alternative, this time I journeyed to their village, seeking help from their father. There, at his ancestral roots, I poured out the anguish that had become the mode of our lives – the hunger, the abandonment, and the silent cries of our children... but instead of offering comfort, like I had hoped he would, his response to the situation was cold dismissal.

He rather pinned the blame on me, claiming that I had been stifling his son, leaving no room for him to breathe. Drawing on our dire circumstances, his solution was a piece of land, a plot that I'd have to cultivate and use as a means to provide for and to feed my children and I, in an indefinite wait for his son's return – even if it took a decade. The weight of his decision, loaded with indifference, pressed on my shoulders. To me, that meant a permanent return and stay in their village.

Leaving their village, I carried with me not only the burden of a broken family, but also the realization that the ties that bound us were failing with each passing moment. It was on the brink of this desolation that I sought refuge at my cousin, Mzee Roman's place, where familial bonds were woven with threads of understanding.

As I aired my tale of despair to Mzee Roman and my aunt Suzana, who was also present, the two showed me compassion. Mzee Roman's words steered my spirit that was once adrift. He urged me to return home with my children. “No child should be left behind”, he emphasized, offering a lifeline for me and my children. In that moment, the possibility of a new beginning took root. With Mzee Roman's encouragement reverberating in my heart, I contemplated a journey that would lead my children and I towards my mother's embrace, where the promise of a new chapter awaited, which in due

time would hopefully drown out the sorrows of the past.

The scars may remain, stamped in the course of my journey, but they serve as markers of a victory hard-earned. The shadows of those turbulent days do not define my present, but are rather the distant background noise, evidence of the strength found in the midst of seemingly insurmountable odds.

In the quietness of my darkest hour, as the weight of despair pressed upon me, I found solace in the timeless parable of the prodigal son. His journey mirrored my own, a longing for a home that offered more than the barren landscape of my struggles ever could. It was with regard to this biblical tale that I made a decision, one that would alter the trajectory of my life.

With my children in tow, their small hands clutching mine, I set forth on a trip towards my parents' home. The road ahead was uncertain, a winding path that held both fear and anticipation. Like the prodigal son, I felt the call to return, seeking refuge in the embrace of those who had, at the very least, never before let me go hungry.

As I approached my childhood home, the feeling of homesickness blended with the chills of apprehension. The decision to entrust my children to my mother's care was a heart-wrenching one, but it held the promise of a fresh start, a chance for them to experience a childhood unscathed by the shadows that had once haunted us.

The door creaked open, and within those familiar walls, I found the comfort of a mother's love waiting. In her arms, my children would hopefully find relief from the storm, a sanctuary where hunger would be resolved with a warm meal, and uncertainty cushioned by the comfort of home. The separation, though painful, felt necessary, a sacrifice for the promise of a better tomorrow.

As I left, the weight of responsibility clung to my shoulders, and the road ahead stretched into the unknown, yet, with each step I took, a renewed sense of determination blossomed within me. The prodigal son, too, faced uncertainty, but his return was met with compassion,



an outstretched embrace and the tender kiss of forgiveness.

With that biblical tale etched in my heart, I embarked on a journey similar to that of the prodigal son, guided by no more than a spark of hope that someday, my return would be marked with the same kind of love, compassion and forgiveness. The road ahead was indeed daunting, but I carried with me the belief that brighter days awaited, not just for me, but for my children, whom I had no choice but to leave in the loving care of my mother, whose futures now fully rested in my hands.

The pages of a new chapter unfolded before me, and with faith as my compass, I ventured into the unknown, hopeful that the journey would lead us to a place where love would mend the wounds of the past and illuminate the path toward a brighter, more promising future.

## **Searching for Opportunities**

Soon after leaving my kids with my mom, my journey unfolded step by step, much like claiming the blessings promised in the Book of Psalm 118:17. I was a single mother of two in my early twenties, venturing out from my village, propelled by an unwavering belief that I could find a way to support myself and my children in the bustling town of Mwanza. My upbringing in a committed Christian family, led by my mother who served as a pastor in Evangelical Assemblies of God – Tanzania, (EAGT), filled me with biblical verses to draw strength from as I embarked on this overwhelming journey. With nothing but a primary school education, without certificates and financial resources, I went forth. My spirit brimmed with positivity, and I relied on faith, not sight. Looking back now, I can only say that I was indeed walking by faith.

My journey began with an unexpected gift. My cousin Jose, aware of my dire circumstances, handed me 10,000 Tanzanian shillings, a sum that would cover my bus fare to Mwanza and leave me with a bit extra. He advised, “Use 2,500 shillings for your bus fare, 5,000 shillings for your meal, and keep the rest as a safety net. In case things don't go as

planned, you'll have the means to make it back home". It was nothing short of a miracle, for I had no means to cover the cost of the trip. I was to travel with my aunt (Jose's mom), as she was to introduce me to a friend of their family, whose home I would be staying in, while she was visiting her husband.

My dear Aunt Suzana, was truly remarkable. She so happened to be my father's elder sister, and her heart was as pure as gold. This woman was not only a loving mother to her 13 children, but also a caring guardian to her brother's children, her sister's children, and even youngsters from her husband's extended family. Her home was always filled with people, but what made it truly special was the abundance of food.

Aunt Suzana was a resilient woman, one who dedicated herself to looking after her family while her husband was away, often embarking in business ventures that kept him absent for extended periods. Sometimes, her husband would return home after four long months, but throughout his absence, Aunt Suzana would still manage the household diligently.

Her house comprised of two rooms for the older boys and another large room with numerous beds to accommodate everyone else. This other room served as a resting place for young boys, young girls, older girls, visitors, domestic helpers and many others. Occasionally, people had to share beds, but we knew better than to complain, because it was far better than the situation in most households.

Aunt Suzana possessed striking beauty, she had a light skin tone, which was a contrast to her husband's dark skin. As kids, we could tell whether her husband was happy or not based off how he greeted her. When he was in a good mood, he'd enter the gate and affectionately call her "Suzy". But when he wasn't pleased, he'd address her by her full name, "Suzana".

I have vivid memories of my aunt's toughness. In our local culture, if a niece ever had a disagreement with her husband and decided to return to her family home, it was often easier to turn to an aunt rather

than her parents. So, when you explained the situation to her, if ever you mentioned that your husband had laid a hand on you, Aunt Suzana would ask probing questions. "How could you claim that he laid his hands on you!? You mean you couldn't defend yourself!? Who is this man that you say laid his hands on you?!" Her firm words were meant to remind you to stand up for yourself and your family. She'd then guide you back to your husband, ensuring that peace was restored at your home. She was our mediator, and she without doubt had a unique gift for resolving family disputes.

Aunt Suzana was of good and kind nature, and when I try to count the number of relatives and others who found shelter in her home, the list seems endless. She welcomed and accommodated so many of us, always ready to offer whatever little she could to whoever was in need. I will forever be grateful to her for opening her home to us.

The morning I set off was filled with excitement and hope. It marked my first journey to Mwanza, a city that had always been a distant dream, painted by stories of grandeur and opportunities. Mwanza, the city of national and international football matches, a hub for international performers, and a gateway to Uganda, held countless promises that beckoned me closer. Mwanza was the biggest city which was closer to home. Before then, I only ever heard stories from people who had the chance to visit the city, and they would make me feel like I was missing out by not doing so too.

In our little village, every Sunday held a special promise – it was trade-fair day. It was as if the whole village was drawn to the city, not always with a specific purpose but simply to be part of the bustling scene. On those market days, folks would gather together, carrying baskets filled with the fruits of their labor – bananas, plantains, onions, potatoes, avocados and many more – all set out for sale at prices that were fair and reasonable compared to most days.

Our village was situated about 7 kilometers away from the city center, a journey that required both determination and endurance. Public transportation was a rare sight, and the roads, especially after rainfall, transformed into treacherous paths that even the sturdy land rovers

used for transport would struggle to navigate. With public transit being scarce and expensive, people often resorted to the simpler alternatives, walking or using bicycles whenever possible.

The money they earned from selling their produce at the market went a long way in securing life's essentials – salt, kerosene, sardines – the small fish, natively known as "dagaa," cooking oil and sometimes maize, which they would take to a nearby milling machine to grind into maize flour, a common staple food.

Sundays, though, were about more than just about business transactions. They were a chance for the men to meet the women, connect with new friends, or simply enjoy the vibrant atmosphere of the market. The 7-kilometer journey to and from was a long one, sometimes endured without food, but the charm of socializing and building connections drew the locals in.

I had a certain uncle of mine whose name was Wambura who was my grandmother's brother's son. We nicknamed him "Wambura O'Ghoko", which translated to "Son of grandma". In those days, customs dictated that, a man needed to pay dowry in form of cows in order to be handed a wife. Without being in possession of cows, marriage was deemed financially out of reach. Wambura, back then living with his aunt (my grandmother), was doomed to face the challenge of acquiring enough cows to be used for dowry.

One fateful Sunday at the busy market, as Wambura chattered with friends, they caught glimpse of a bus arriving from Mwanza. There was a common tradition of assisting the passengers with finding their relatives, their host, or with securing their luggage. As the passengers disembarked, a woman with a baby on her back stood out – she seemed disoriented and lost. Wambura's friends began teasing him, suggesting that he should approach her; then maybe, by some mere luck, he could be fortunate enough to land a wife without having to worry about paying dowry.

With regard to his seemingly insurmountable issue of dowry, Wambura resorted to approaching the woman, who appeared to have

no place to go. Together with one of his friends, they made the choice to bring her to our home, where we lived with our grandmother. They were both excited about the possibility of Wambura having found a wife.

However, they overlooked one crucial detail. The woman they had picked up from the city center had mental health problems. It was only when they arrived at our home that they realized something was amiss. My mother had prepared a meal for Wambura and his friend, which she graciously served to them.

As kids, we were drawn to the baby on her back, a child of approximately about 9 months to a year old. But the real surprise came during mealtime. While our usual prayer was simple, asking for blessings on our food, her prayer was anything but ordinary. She spoke of things we couldn't quite understand, things like "Jesus dying and rising on the third day" and "the absence of power in the tomb." After this unusual prayer, when everyone was ready to enjoy their meal, stiff porridge (ugali), she abruptly picked the accompaniment, a vegetable dish, and announced that she would be the one to distribute it among them. They were all meant to share the same vegetables from a single bowl it was then that Wambura's friend, in sheer realization, whispered to him, "So, she's crazy?" That moment, with utter realization that something seemed odd, brought the meal to a standstill.

As I journeyed towards Mwanza, anticipation building within me, I couldn't help but recall these old stories. I was eager to reach the city, to see it with my own eyes, and to embark on my own adventure, knowing that every day held the promise of the unexpected.

As the journey commenced, I was seated beside my aunt in the bus, my mind a surge of thoughts and emotions. The five-hour trip seemed to go by in a blink of an eye, and then, in due time, the extensive city of Mwanza came into view. The sight was an intriguing revelation, a stark contrast to the greatness I had envisioned.

Like it is common for travelers to feel hungry during a long journey on the road, that trip was no different. At every pit stop, vendors lined

up, selling an array of delectable delights: boiled eggs, roasted ground nuts, ripe bananas, crispy fried fish and freshly grilled maize. To quench my thirst, I transacted with vendors that hawked chilled water, fizzy sodas and creamy yogurt.

But unlike me, some daring souls among our fellow travelers went for the solid food options, pairing boiled eggs with baked maize while others incorporated groundnuts, yogurt and bananas. The consequences were anything but pleasant; stomachs churned, discomfort and dissatisfaction became evident as passengers groaned in agony and retched.

It was the year 1999, and I was brimming with anticipation. As my aunt announced our arrival, I looked out the window, only to be greeted by a horde of taxi drivers fighting for our attention. Nearby, cart-pullers eagerly volunteered to assist those burdened with heavy luggage, while couriers hustled to offer help with the cumbersome bags. My aunt was disinterested in these services, and I, my curiosity stirred up, trailed in her footsteps, casting enthusiastic glances at the busy surroundings.

I couldn't help but wonder where the city was, for in truth, the reality of Mwanza was a whole lot different compared to what I had pictured based off the vivid stories of fellow villagers who had journeyed here before. To me, this city had been a majestic metropolis, and the actuality was a revelation that took me by surprise.

Stepping off the bus with a modest bag clutched to my side, containing only a small assortment of clothing, I followed my aunt into a building situated within the heart of the city, the National Housing unit. This was our destination, the home to dear friends of the family. In those days, before mobile phones and constant connectivity was a thing, travel meant arriving to your host unannounced, a concept both peculiar and charming if you ask me.

To my surprise, my aunt and I were, as it turns out, unexpected guests, I watched with a mix of fascination and anxiety as my aunt elucidated my situation to Mama Kazi, our gracious host. Internally, I pondered

the what-ifs, the possibility that she might turn me down. The thought of returning home loomed in my mind.

But with open arms and a warm heart, Mama Kazi welcomed us without hesitation. Later on, as her husband, Baba Kazi, returned home from work, introductions were made once more, and my aunt recounted my story to them. With the same generosity as that of his wife, Baba Kazi declared, "There is no problem; she can stay with us". Their kindness and compassion enveloped me, and just like that, I became a part of their household.

I was no different from any other village girl venturing into the lively city for the very first time. The warmth of my loving new family had always engulfed me, providing a reassuring embrace. But there I stood, with no more than a primary school education, facing the daunting prospect of seeking a job in the city.

My journey had only just begun, and I was prepared to embrace the challenges and opportunities that awaited me in Mwanza city. I carried solemnly the faith instilled within me during my upbringing, and the support of the remarkable people who had touched my life in one way or another. This was the beginning of a new chapter, and I was determined to rewrite my story in the city of Mwanza. However hard it would be.

## **Chapter Two**

### **City of Dreams and Uncharted Realities**

#### **Navigating the Urban Tapestry**

In the extensive vicinity of the city, my purpose unfolded like a map revealing its secrets—a quest for gainful employment. For young women like myself, who had navigated the well-worn path from rural landscapes to the promises of the urban frontier, the journey was loaded with challenges. Armed with limited education and aspirations for stability, the road often led to the familiar uniform of a waitress, tending in bars that painted the cityscape. But that destiny, that prescribed narrative, was not the script I envisioned for myself.

In the plot of my dreams, I held onto the belief that something greater awaited, if only time would unfold its possibilities. My ambition wasn't tied to the well-worn paths; it was secured in the conviction that I could find joy in a decent profession, maintain my integrity and gain respect, even if the canvas of my activities was painted with the humble colors of something as basic as selling tomatoes.

The crucial moments remained engraved in my memory, reiterated as proposals in Mama Kazi's gentle tone. "Tomorrow, we need to go to these town offices, my dear, in search of a means of livelihood for you.



Who knows what opportunities await? Perhaps as an office messenger or office cleaner." Her eyes, earnest and full of hope, bore into mine, emphasizing the urgency of the quest. "You need to secure work; after all, you have little ones to care for."

In those moments, the weight of responsibility pressed on me, a call to action that resonated beyond the crowded streets. Mama Kazi's words were not just mere suggestions; they were a lifeline, a beacon illuminating the path towards a future where my aspirations could bloom, even against the backdrop of uncertainty. And so, with uphold of her encouragement in my heart, I stepped into the city, a seeker of opportunity, a dreamer determined to carve a path that defied the well-trodden expectations that sought to define my journey.

In the city's maze of offices, Mama Kazi's familiarity with certain individuals became our secret weapon—a bridge between the known and the unknown. Some were church companions, while others stood as steadfast friends, aiding with connections that eased our ventures into these bureaucratic realms. Navigating the reception areas felt like a choreographed dance; all we had to do was whisper the name of the person we sought, and Mama Kazi, so happened to have a roster of friends within those hallowed halls. Thus, our visits were basically almost always unannounced, but welcomed nonetheless, fueled by a sense of hope that permeated the air.

Each encounter was a chapter in our mission, a narrative Mama Kazi passionately unfolded with each introduction. "Hello, this is my daughter, and we're in search of employment for her," she would declare, her voice carrying optimism as she presented my aspirations to those we met. Each handshake, each exchange, was a step towards the future, one where my dreams could take root and grow.

As for me, someone accustomed to village traditions thrust into the unfamiliar tangles of city offices, each entrance felt like crossing a threshold into a world I had never known before. Everything was novel—the faces with expressions that hinted at myriad stories, the rhythm of office life, the unseen currents guiding the daily tasks. With my little understanding, I grappled with the expectations, the

undefined role of an office messenger felt like a journey into an entirely different realm.

In spite of all the uncertainty, there was a spark of possibility. Each handshake, each word spoken in those office corridors, carried the potential to alter the course of my narrative. And as I ventured further into this uncharted territory, I clung to the hope that, in that world beyond the village, opportunities awaited, and my humble aspirations could find a place to unfold and bloom.

The weight of their inquisitive looks, the probing gaze into my qualifications reiterated in the hallowed halls of those city offices; "Amesoma nini?" "What are her qualifications?" They'd ask, their voices brimming with curiosity. In response, I would draw in a deep breath, anxiety taking a toll on my self-confidence, and it was always Mama Kazi who would answer on my behalf, "She completed her primary school education". "We are seeking opportunities for her, as an office messenger, or perhaps as a cleaner". The air choked with anticipation; it was like we could almost predict their responses before it even escaped their lips.

Their replies, delivered with gentle thoughtfulness, carried a truth I couldn't quite escape. "For now, we have no vacancies she could fill in, but perhaps she should consider returning to school to better align with the job market." Words although striking disappointment within me, nonetheless loaded with wisdom and encouragement, addressing the reality of my present predicament.

Office after office, Mama Kazi's optimism remained unyielding. She continued to motivate me, her words a comforting balm, assuring me that one day, the opportunity we sought for so hard would materialize. Yet, as I navigated the path from one office to the next, in pursuit of a job which I knew deep down I lacked the qualifications for, I refused to give in to the void of despair. Instead, my mind began to think of alternative opportunities that would better suit me.

Perhaps, I pondered, I could dive into the vibrant market, offering the world a different print of my dreams – a cart brimming with tomatoes

or any commodity the people desired. The promising state of the market seemed to signal, and in that moment, the spirit of resilience took root. The rejection I constantly dealt with in those office corridors became ground for the blossoming of unconventional aspirations, a reminder that even in the face of closed doors, there were avenues yet to be explored, waiting to reveal the unanticipated, and hopefully better chapters of my story.

In the sanctuary of Mama Kazi's home, a glimmer of change arrived with my aunt's husband. His face, painted with hope, bore news that would usher me into the world of employment. A workplace had been found, a path for me to step onto. The catch, he explained, was a two-week training period, with little compensation. There was also a uniform requirement – a pure white blouse paired with a gloomy black skirt or a pair of trousers.

The opportunity lay within the walls of the renowned Coconut Tree Hotel, where my journey as a waitress would commence. The shifts stretched from 15:00hrs to 22:00hrs, something that was admittedly a silver lining in terms of proximity from Mama Kazi's residence.

The environment of the Coconut Tree Hotel, draped in the glamour of its name, unfurled into a landscape of challenges. From my first day at the job, a singular order resonated through the corridors – "The customer is always right!" Dissent found little foothold, even when confronted with injustice from patrons. Every day, at the end of my shift, the manager would summon me for an appraisal. Sadly, commendation was never once a part of those conversations. Instead, I had to constantly endure a torrent of criticisms, each one worse than the last, a relentless critique of my perceived shortcomings. I lacked competence, exhibited unkindness to customers, and needed a profound transformation to align with the hotel's noble standards.

In the matter of the hotel's polished impression, the reality of my daily struggles became evident. Yet, regardless of the load of challenges, I remained resilient. Each criticism, each harsh word, became a steppingstone, propelling me towards an unforeseen destination. As I navigated the challenging obligation of pleasing customers, while also

having to meet the hotel's exacting standards, I held onto the hope that, just as a Coconut Tree stands firm amidst strong winds, I too would find strength in the face of adversity, reaching towards a future where my efforts would be acknowledged, and the critiques I took day after day would somehow transform into tributes.

The nightmare, that was my place of employment, cast its heavy shadow each morning, a ruthless weight on my shoulders as I faced the prospect of returning to the ever-demanding maze. The stress it bore down on my spirit, was an overwhelming force that threatened to extinguish even the little shred of hope I had left within me.

A majority of the hotel's clientele were men, their behavior often accompanied with rudeness, especially when they were under the influence of alcohol. Their hands seemed to have a mind of their own, reaching to grab any part of my body they deemed fit. Firmly, I turned down their inappropriate advances, a stance that only seemed to intensify the manager's discontent towards me. In his eyes, I lacked the proficient art of customer care.

Enduring this demanding routine for a mere two weeks felt like a lifetime. Then, on an evening steeped in exhaustion, after wrapping up my second week at my new job, I returned home and poured out my soul to Mama Kazi. I admitted, "I can't go back there. This job is draining me, and I don't think I can bear it any longer". "I am willing to forgo my education and endure the challenges life has thrown my way, but I cannot subject myself to such a toxic environment any more than I already have."

In Mama Kazi's home, my confession, a proclamation that reiterated the grievance of my soul, became apparent. The weight of my decision, the relinquishment of a job that suffocated my essence, carried a sense of liberation. And as I stood at the crossroads, willing to navigate the uncharted terrain of an uncertain future, I clung to the belief that there existed a path where my dignity and my spirit could flourish, unfettered by the toxicity that had threatened to consume me.

Mama Kazi, the epitome of boundless empathy, responded, with a

sense of assurance evident in her tone, "We shall persevere through prayer, and God, in His grace, shall illuminate an alternative path."

Before I left the comfort of my village, my mother, a wellspring of strength, shared with me a heartwarming revelation. She told me about a cousin of mine, more like a sister, who dwelled in Mwanza city, navigating the currents of urban life. A daughter to my mother's sister. My knowledge of the existence of this relative held the possibility of connection and familiarity in the vastness of the city. Her existence, unknown to me until that moment, stirred my curiosity, building anticipation creeping within me that begged to be shared with Mama Kazi.

In unanimous agreement, Mama Kazi and I decided it was time to make use of this familial connection. On one sunny day, we embarked on a trip to visit my cousin at her workplace, the Old Post Office area, marked by the name "NIC". I had met her once, a distant memory from my early childhood, when she, together with the rest of her family, journeyed from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's commercial city, to our tranquil village. The love shared between my mother and her sisters, among which is my cousin's mother, transcended words. Reflecting on it now, the magnitude of my aunt's journey to visit us in the village, traveling by train with her five children, deserves to be acknowledged. It was an extraordinary proof to the bonds that defied the constraints of distance and circumstance.

Their journey took a total of three days, some sort of shared adventure for them and us all. All the way from the vibrant city of Dar es Salaam, they carried with them the pulse of urban life, while we nestled in a modest mud-brick house in the heart of the village, unacquainted to the luxury of modern amenities like electricity and running water. Our home, a basic two-room structure, was situated amidst banana and coffee plantations. As my aunt and her kids stepped into our world, we stood in awe of the treasures they brought – the lavishness of their clothes, their refined Swahili, tinged with a coastal accent, and the stories they told us about their modern conveniences, like them owning a fridge, and the luxury of lavish sofas, items foreign to us who knew nothing but the ways by which we survived in the village.

In the midst of that interesting interaction, I recall my cousin, Mike, his eyes gleaming with childlike curiosity, posing questions that seemingly filled his young mind, questions of the stark contrast that stood out between their life in the city and that of our village. "How do you manage without a fridge?" In that moment, even he grasped with understanding the differences that clearly defined our lives. The exchange of questions and the exploration of each other's worlds became a bridge, connecting the dots between two evidently disparate existences.

Their visit was more than just a reunion; it felt more like a convergence of worlds. We became explorers of each other's lives, navigating the uncharted territories of differences and commonalities. As we shared stories while taking in the surroundings, laughter ran everywhere, permeating the contrasts that sought to separate us. And in those days, with regard to the simplicity of our village life compared to the sophistication of their own in the city, we bonded over the shared experiences of family that transcended the tangible and embraced the intangible, ergo celebrating the beauty of our diverse journeys.

The days were not just an adventure for us; they were a profound experience for our city kin. Accustomed to the conveniences of Dar es Salaam, they became acquainted with the ways of our village, where we fetched water from a distant source, washed clothes in the river, and relied on the produce of our farm for every meal. The patterns of our day-to-day life. Bananas, plantains, sweet potatoes, cassava, maize and vegetables were our staples, direct from the farm, whereas meat and sugar were mere luxuries, not necessities. They arrived from a world adapted to the use of spices and coconut cream, to a place where our culinary skills revolved around boiling food with nothing but water and a dash of salt. Despite the simplicity of our meals and the challenges of our rustic existence, it was the strong bond of love between us that seamlessly bridged the gap between our two worlds.

I will forever be grateful to Aunt Grace, the cornerstone of enduring love in regard to our shared history, from those transformative days up until now. May God bless her abundantly, for she not only bridged the

variation of our ways of life, but also cherished bonds that endured the tests of time and distance!

In the radiant sunlight, Mama Kazi and I journey towards the NIC building, a prominent landmark in the cityscape. Anticipation built within me, on account of the uncertainties of the city. What started off as a mere visit transformed into a new-found path, one that connected my unfortunate past to the unfolding chapters of my present. As we approached the door to the office, the buzz of the city all around us, I felt within me a sense of unity, with regard to the bonds of family that I was about to revisit after a long period of time.

Entering my cousin's office felt like stepping into a haven of hope within the vastness of the city. I found reassurance in the knowledge that family was close by, ready to lend a hand or simply share a moment. Mama Kazi, my steadfast companion, escorted me into this shelter. There, I unraveled the story of my life thus far—my compelling reasons for being in town, as well as the details of my current living situation. My cousin, after our long, yet necessary catch up, welcomed me with genuine delight.

As we conversed, the walls of her office became witnesses to the stories we exchanged. I shared the reality of my journey, and along with it, the dreams that wavered within me like delicate wings. In return, she painted to me a picture of the city—a variety of opportunities, challenges, and the conventional flow of life. In that moment, within the confines of her office, family ties became a lifeline, grounding me in the midst of the city's whirlwind.

Before parting ways, she extended a gracious invitation, she shared with me her physical address in an area called Nyegezi, where I would be welcomed with open arms whenever I needed a place to fall back at. As we stepped back into the city, in the vast expanse of the uncertain, the aspirations tied to kinship offered solace and companionship in the journey that lay ahead.

As we navigate the twists and turns of life, it becomes clear that sometimes, it's the simple connections and the enduring bonds of love

that illuminate our way in the vastness of the world. These moments, like the one I shared with my cousin in that office in the city, serve as gentle reminders of the profound power of familial ties.

Reflecting on such moments now, my mind drifts to a verse in the Bible, words engraved in my heart. From the Book of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, which says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres." These words capture the essence of the love that carries us through each passing day, connecting us to family, no matter where life may take us.

In the ebb and flow of our journeys, it's this patient and kind love that becomes our guiding star. It's the love that withstands distance and time that rejoices in shared truths and protects in the face of uncertainties. It's a love that persists, building resilience through the course of our lives. And as we embrace the unknown that are likely to happen, these connections, anchored in love, serve as beacons of light, guiding our paths in this world.



## Chapter Three

### Navigating Life's Challenges and Embracing Humble Beginnings

#### **Integrity's Refrain: Unraveling the Threads of Unexpected Choices**

As I sat there, in that small room on the third floor of the CCM building, surrounded by the rhythmic clatter of typewriters and the resounds of constant footsteps in the corridor, I couldn't help but reflect on how this unexpected opportunity had unfolded.

Gloria, my kind and generous cousin sister, had seen something in me that I hadn't seen in myself. Her surprise announcement about sponsoring me for a secretarial course was the lifeline I didn't know I needed. It was as if she had handed me a key to unlock the door to my potential, and with the utmost sense of determination, I was ready to turn it.

The school she had chosen for me, nestled within walking distance from my area of residence, felt like a haven of possibilities. With just a primary school education in hand, this institution welcomed individuals like me, offering a chance to break free from the hardships that threatened to crown my days.

As I stepped into the classroom, I was greeted by the sight of clacking typewriters. Ten of us, a group of hopefuls, each with a story written all over our faces, were seated at our designated stations.

In the beginners' class, the typewriters became both our adversaries and allies. We weren't just learning to press keys; we were mastering the art of turning letters into words, and words into clear sentences. The instructor's voice guided us throughout our training period, they helped us transform the basic art of typing to a level of perfection, where we became capable of crafting words and symbols into a combination of sentences with comprehensible meaning.

It was without doubt difficult at first, but with each misspelled word and every misplaced punctuation, over time, we eventually figured it out. The typewriter keys, once unfamiliar and daunting, soon became evidence to our withstanding determination. We were not just typing as it seemed; but with each day we stepped inside that classroom, ready and determined to give our all, we were crafting our own individual stories of resilience.

Through the weeks and months in that institution, I persevered through the stages – from the basics to the advanced. The exams, conducted by the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA), in Igoma, Mwanza, were milestones marking my journey from uncertainty to accomplishment. The lessons, once intimidating, had become the aid of my transformation into the person I had been inspiring to become.

As I reflect on that chapter of my life now, I am reminded of Gloria's unwavering belief in my potential and the transformative power of seizing unexpected opportunities. The clacking typewriters may have faded with time, but the memories of that classroom continue to resonate within me, a challenging, yet necessary risk that I took a chance on, one that was a step closer into changing the course of my future.

Back then, offices heavily relied on typewriters, and coincidentally, my cousin sister had established a secretarial services office. So, after

school, I became a willing trainee. I would lend a hand at the office, soaking up knowledge like a sponge - photocopying, printing and even occasionally using computers. Scanning and binding documents became second nature to me. Our secretarial office was a vibrant hub of activity, where people flocked for printing and photocopying services. It was a time when very few offices in the city had computers, and laptops were a scarcity. Whenever someone needed to draft a letter, they would have no choice but to visit a secretarial services office like ours.

This journey is a testament to the power of determination, the support of family and the belief that education can open doors to a brighter future that most probably nothing else can. It reminds me of the Bible verse from the Book of Proverbs 16:3 which says, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans". In those moments, I could feel God's guidance and support, the grace that helped me carve my path in this world.

As days went by, my days at the secretarial services office proved to be worthy. In an era where offices deemed typewriting and all services related to it as necessities, my cousin sister's venture into the world of secretarial services aligned perfectly with the skills I had mastered during my secretarial course.

I marveled at the evolution of my own capabilities over time. From the hesitant beginner I once was in a typewriting class, to a much more confident one. I was navigating a world that had once seemed distant and unfamiliar. The secretarial services office became my sanctuary, a place where the ravages of my past struggles were slowly being drowned out by the attestation of my progress.

Hence, in the heart of the busy secretarial office, surrounded by the tangible evidence of my journey, I realized that my story was still unfolding, each chapter a proof to the transformative power of resilience and the firm belief that with faith, determination and education, one could overcome any obstacle in life.

Amidst the hectic days at the office, my life took an unexpected turn,

a chapter inscribed in my memories. This is where a certain man, whose name I will not make known, a person who came into my life, and in his own way altered the course of my journey in ways I never anticipated.

He was a man with solid dreams and a future he envisioned with me in it. Nonetheless, the dreams he had in mind were not of my own desires. Admittedly, our friendship was a dearly cherished part of my life, but I had no aspirations whatsoever to advance far beyond that. Despite my clear stance on the matter, he went on and did the exact opposite, he let himself get tangled up in emotions that I wanted no part of.

Days went by, and said man secured a scholarship to study abroad – the exact country eludes my memory, but the impact of his absence was vividly felt. Over the course of more than a year, he traversed unknown destinations, chasing aspirations far beyond what I knew, way far beyond my reach at the moment. When he finally returned, he came bearing gifts, jewelry, clothes and so much more. However, as I said to a friend of mine named Alpha, the guilt of receiving such gifts gnawed uncomfortably on my conscious, solely because I knew that handing them to me meant more to him than it did to me. "These gifts make me feel uneasy; I won't use any of them", I confessed, choosing to simply preserve them in the confines of my home.

A mere week later, said guy approached me with a request that cast a shadow over our friendship. He expressed his desire for the two of us to visit his parents in the village. However, the reason he presented to me for wanting me to meet his parents left me puzzled – his parents, for some reason, believed that he was engaged to someone, which according to him, the person in question was me. That revelation struck me like a gush of wind, unexpected and unsettling. I had never consented to this idea, and the thought of masquerading as his fiancée was just inconceivable.

In a moment of dire honesty and vulnerability, I confronted him, "Why not just tell them the truth?" I inquired. His response, a plea for my support in upholding this charade with just one visit, lingered in the

room. He promised that after this brief meeting, I could resume with my life as if nothing had transpired. But I couldn't quite understand the benefits of perpetuating such a risky lie – to his parents, to myself and most of all to the trust that defined our relationship as dear friends. My answer, explicit and firm, was a resounding “no”.

As a result of opening up about how I felt about the difficult situation he had put me in, said man took a step back, acknowledging the discomfort his proposal had inflicted on our friendship. The following day, a messenger came to me, one sent to collect the gifts he had bestowed upon me. Without a moment's hesitation, I handed them over, for I had felt uneasy from the moment they were handed to me. Though my own possessions were nothing too special, my peace of my mind was of much more Importance to me than mere material things.

A month later, he returned, not with new gifts, but rather with an apology. He wanted to give back to me what he had once retrieved. The jewelry, the clothes – presents he had brought me from his journey before. But I stood my ground, firm in my decision. I rejected them, suggesting that he hand these gifts to friends or relatives who might find joy in receiving them.

His decision to repossess them some time back marked the first time someone had reclaimed their gifts simply because my heart had not consented to their advances. In that moment, I realized the weight of my convictions, the power of saying no, not just to people, but to compromises that eroded the essence of my being.

That chapter in my life held a profound lesson based off my experiences – a lesson on the importance of standing firm in my choices in the face of difficult circumstances, of being true to oneself regardless of what may be offered to me. It resonates with the wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs 11:3, which says, "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity". In choosing integrity, I navigated a path guided by my values, even if it meant losing possession of material things.

As I closed that chapter of my life, I carried forward newfound strength, a sense of resilience born from the crucible of difficult decisions. Little did I know, that that lesson in integrity would become a steadfast companion, a lantern illuminating the dark corners of the journey that lay ahead.

## **A Room Full of Love and Hope**

In the ebb and flow of my journey, not long after I had engaged myself in the flow of my cousin's secretarial office, another door swung open, propelling me towards a new opportunity – a role as a receptionist at a company called Norconsult. It felt like a significant step forward, a testimony to the benefits of the knowledge I had acquired in the field of office management and typewriting.

At Norconsult, I had landed more than just a job; I got acquainted with a community of colleagues who welcomed me with open arms. They became mentors, guides, on this unfolding path I had been coursing on, offering me the gift of in-house training that went beyond the confines of textbooks and typewriters. Among them was a fellow employee named Dossa, a colleague whose patience and guidance left an indelible mark on my journey.

In those early days at my new profession, Dossa took it upon himself to teach me the practical details of answering office calls. "Hello, this is Norconsult Mwanza office, how may I assist you?" he'd reiterate, emphasizing the need for balance between politeness and professionalism. It was a lesson I had acquired in my evening secretarial classes before, but putting it into practice in the real world had a hint of complexity to it. The phones became my training ground, each call an opportunity to refine my tone, to infuse courtesy into every word uttered.

Dossa also unveiled the basics of call transfers, a skill that proved invaluable in navigating the web of office communications. As I seamlessly transferred calls from one department to another, I marveled at the extent of collaboration that prevailed through the

corridors of Norconsult.

Our clients, civil engineers from various districts in Mwanza Region, became my partners in this professional ballet. Engaging with them opened a new realm of work, exposing me to the complex details of their projects and their language of blueprints. In this dynamic environment, I continued to hone my communication skills, learning to navigate the nuanced conversations that bridged the gap between receptionists and civil engineers in that establishment.

In the essence of Norconsult, amidst the constancy of productivity and the continual flow of phone calls, I discovered that that was not just any job, but also a classroom, where each interaction, each transfer, was a lesson in effective communication. The colleagues who had welcomed me with open arms, the mentors who had taken me under their wing – they became the architects of my evolving narrative, shaping a story that transcended the boundaries of office walls and reached towards the limitless possibilities of a future progressively unfolding.

During my days at Norconsult, a new activity, at least to me, emerged – the world of office parties, a realm entirely unfamiliar to me up until then. These gatherings became a breath of fresh air, inducing my life with unexpected delight I didn't know I needed. They were moments of celebration, of fellowship, where we could momentarily set aside our worries and revel in the simple joys of life.

As I navigated the intricacies of office dynamics, my two colleagues, Dossa and Erick, who had become like brothers to me, my steadfast pillars of support, continued to be my guiding stars. Their bond had them playfully referring to each other as "Master." This engaging nickname captured the depth of their connection, one that surpassed the challenges life casted their way. Their unity and unwavering support for one another became an important lesson in my evolving story – a lesson about the strength that family could provide.

My job at Norconsult, a one-year contract, unraveled as a chapter of growth and self-reliance. Mr. Orwa, our gentle team leader, played the

role of a guiding figure, imparting wisdom and encouragement as I navigated the world of professionalism. With each passing day, my confidence in my abilities increased, nurtured by the patient mentorship of those who believed in my potential.

Beyond the confines of the office, I had a purpose that held profound significance to me – supporting my children. I knew that at the end of each month, I would have to send something to my mother, a contribution resulting from the sweat of my labor. It was a routine that mirrored the force behind my determination, a commitment to providing for my family amidst life's challenges.

As the final days of my contract at Norconsult arrived, I found myself standing at a point of uncertainty once more. Unemployment, a daunting specter, loomed over me. The path ahead seemed shadowed, but just when I needed it most, a friend emerged as a saving grace.

This friend, a guiding light in the dimness of my circumstances, just like my cousin sister, owned a secretarial office. In a gesture of friendship and compassion, he offered me a lifeline, promising to cover my bus fare and provide me with daily sustenance. The offer came with a request – to assist him in managing the office. It wasn't just a mere job; it was a gesture of solidarity, a reminder that even in the face of adversity, there were hands willing to reach out and lift me from the depths of despair.

He emphasized the importance of staying active, of maintaining forward momentum even when the road ahead seemed uncertain. "It'll be easier to secure new opportunities while you're working than while sitting at home doing nothing", he wisely advised. Henceforth, I embraced this opportunity with unwavering determination, keeping in mind that sometimes, the key to progress lays not in the grand leaps, but in the steady ones, in persistent steps taken even during the toughest of times.

My new workplace, and the way through which I secured that opportunity to further better myself, was a proof to the power of friendship, a reminder that even in the face of adversity, the bonds of



friendship could serve as a safety net for those navigating the unpredictable currents of life. As I persevered, I learned that, the support I received, and the unyielding belief that even in the face of uncertainty, movement, no matter how small, was a form of progress, a way to inch closer to the opportunities that may be waiting ahead.

### **Threads of Destiny: Unexpected Bonds and Shared Growth**

As the chapters of my life continued to unfold, I managed to progress to a new role as a Secretary/Receptionist at a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), a position I had worked hard for several months to secure. It marked a new chapter in my journey, one that I dedicated three years of my life to.

By then, my daughter had progressed to being a first grader, and since I knew the importance of acquiring quality education, the best available option was to enroll her in a boarding school. Private schools were scarce in our village back then, and the nearby boarding school seemed like the right choice. However, what followed after I enrolled her was a challenging experience that extremely shook me to my core.

Every time I visited her at the boarding school, I noticed signs of her deteriorating well-being. Her skin appeared dry and neglected, almost as if it had never been moisturized before. But what broke my heart even more was witnessing her resort to eating bits of paper and soil, a sign of the immense stress and hardship she was facing at the school. Such conditions made her prone to illness and left her struggling to cope.

One visit in particular will forever haunt my memory. Upon stopping by for a visit, I noticed that she was wearing just one sock, despite owning ten pairs that I had provided for her when she first reported to school. This baffled me, and served as a stern reality of the difficulties she was enduring.

Today, my advice to parents such as myself is: "Do not send your young children to boarding schools". What I witnessed with my

daughter serves as a testament to the importance of keeping our children close, at least until they are old enough to take good care of themselves, the importance of nurturing them with love and care, and ensuring their well-being and happiness above all else.

One day, my mother embarked on a journey from Tarime to Dodoma for a church conference. Back then, very few people owned cellphones, so arranging meetings during travel was a matter of faith and hope rather than convenience. One would have to board a bus, trusting that their host would be there to pick them up upon arrival. It was a system that occasionally led to inconvenient mix-ups and a bit of wandering, especially if one couldn't remember or was completely unaware of their host's physical address. Nonetheless, the people were kind, always willing to help out whoever needed to figure out their way to their host.

One particular evening, my mother's arrival in Mwanza, the city where I resided, caught me by surprise. She had unexpectedly brought my son along with her, and I couldn't fathom the reason for it at first. In our African culture, it is customary not to flood someone with questions, especially after a long journey. Instead, you ought to prioritize their comfort, ensure they've had a good meal, and only then could you initiate the conversation. So, I adhered to such tradition, offering her and my son the warmest hospitality I could provide them.

My mother was not just any visitor; she was a pastor leading a church in our village, under the Evangelical Assemblies of God (EAGT). Her purpose for this journey was to attend the women's conference which was being held in Dodoma, and my son's arrival with her was part of a fantastic plan she had in mind. She had purposefully brought him along so she could leave him with me, and this took me by surprise.

My son, from the tender age of one, found a home in my mother's care. Although I visited regularly, the title "mom" remained elusive, a name reserved for my sister-in-law, who had the chance to be around my children more than I ever could, due to the responsibilities I had to assume in order to be financially capable of supporting my children and their upbringing, one whose own children painted her world with

maternal hues. To my son, I only ever was as a distant figure, a stranger in the narrative of his early years.

As he grew older, around the year he progressed to grade two, and our worlds began to intertwine more closely, questions arose that betrayed the innocence of his childhood. He would approach me, placing his hand next to mine, pondering aloud why our skin tones differed. "If you are my mother", he would inquire, "why do we not look alike? You are lighter, and I am darker". The complexities of genetics went far beyond what his young mind could grasp, yet, his observations revealed the curiosity of a child trying to make sense of his place in this world.

Sometimes, in moments of perceived punishment, he would seek solace in a declaration that cut through the intricacies of our relationship. "After all," he would assert, "you are not my mother". These words, uttered in his early primary school years, served as a shield to him against the discomfort that he experienced whenever I sought to discipline him, a defense mechanism in the face of a reality not fully comprehended.

In his innocent world, the complicated details of the arrangement remained shrouded in mystery. The impending shift, where his grandmother, my mother, a steadfast presence in his life, planned to leave him in my care, was yet to reveal itself to his understanding. All he knew was that a journey lay ahead for him and his beloved grandmother, a trip of shared moments and cherished bonds.

The initial plan unfolded with the hope that, after the conference, my mother would reunite with her relatives in Dar es Salaam—her father, sisters and brother, whom she had missed dearly. A return to the village was to take place later on, where she would pick up my son and bring him back to her home with her. However, as unpredictable as life is, it carved its own unforeseen path.

Her visit extended farther beyond Dar es Salaam as initially intended, reaching the distant city of Arusha, where the desire to reconnect with another sister took hold of her. Days slipped away unnoticed, and her

return was pushed further into uncertainty. The rhythmic flow of life, dictated by her teaching duties at Kibumaye Primary School, signaled a truth that slowly became apparent: my son's stay with me was destined to extend into an indefinite period.

Yet, in the midst of this unforeseen reality, a silver lining emerged. Fortune smiled upon us, for my landlord's wife, Mama Goody, was constantly present at their home. Her generosity knew no bounds, and her son, Eric, of the same age as my own, became a companion in the shared moments of childhood. Mama Goody graciously offered to care for my son while I toiled away at work.

To further ease the juggling act of parenthood and employment, I enrolled my son in the same kindergarten that Eric, my landlord's son, had been attending. Their shared adventures and synchronized schedules brought a sense of order to the chaotic situation that threatened to disrupt my daily schedule. Mama Goody's kindness was a much-appreciated support, a comforting assurance that my son was in the safe hands of a family that radiated care and love.

No longer burdened by the worry of where to entrust my son during the day, I found comfort in the knowledge that he was safe in the care of Mama Goody's household. In this unexpected twist of fate, the kindness of others became the anchor that steadied my journey as a working single mother, transforming the challenges life threw my way into opportunities for shared growth and collective care for my son.

### **Bonds beyond Blood: A Room of Love and Unwavering Commitment**

In that particular season of my life, I had been living in a tiny room which I shared with my dear friend Alpha. Within those four walls, every emotion, every dream and every challenge, to each their own, had to find a way to coexist harmoniously.

Before we even moved into this modest space, we resided with my cousin sister, Gloria, together with her husband, in a bigger house.

However, things changed when her husband secured a job in Moshi, prompting their move from Mwanza to Moshi.

The family grew beyond just myself and Alpha to include Aggy, my cousin's younger sister, Mary—the baby seater, and my cousin sister's two kids, Junior and Timo. During school holidays, Markon, my brother-in-law's cousin, and Eliza, my cousin, would also join us.

Markon and Eliza brought with them the energy of high school students, discussing academic concerns and future plans with my cousin sister's husband, Prof. Yona. Their conversations, steeped in the language of mathematics and university dreams and aspirations, filled the room. As they spoke of ambitions, Alpha, Aggy and I, with our limited educational backgrounds, became silent observers.

It was during one of these moments when academic discussions heated up, my cousin, always ready to make people laugh, jumped in to change the topic. With a big smile, she said, “when I took my Form Four exams, they offered me Division One and Two, but I chose Division Four instead!”. Her joke made everyone laugh and lightened the mood. It reminded them that even though they had big ambitions, everyone had a different story.

The room became a place where laughter mingled with the recount of the challenges of our diverse journeys. While others spoke of universities and academic pursuits and aspirations, our hearts, Aggy's, Alpha's and my own, longed for something far more different. Aggy's jesting rebellion echoed the sentiment that, though the courses of our lives and what we had been through up until that point may differ, the bonds of familial relationships and shared experiences were what truly mattered to us.

A single bed stood in one corner, its edges barely leaving room for us to move around. We would sit there, side by side, sharing stories, dreams and sometimes our deepest fears and worries. The bedroom was more than just a place to rest our weary bodies; it was a space where our laughter and whispered secrets hovered.

At the center of the room, we had a coffee table with stools around it, where we'd gather for our daily meals, and it was here where we broke bread together, forging bonds as strong as the steel pots in which our meals simmered. Our tiny stove faithfully served as the heart of our home. We would cook together, sharing recipes and experimenting with flavors, something so trivial to the human eye, yet a cherished routine we occasionally indulged in to further solidify the ties that bound us.

Every utensil we owned had its designated place, and it was essential to maintain order in our compact space. We shared them without hesitation, the embodiment to the age-old saying: "A friend in need is a friend indeed". As we chopped, stirred and sipped tea from the same cups, we learned that it wasn't the size of the room but the vastness of our hearts that truly mattered.

Our clothing, too, inhabited this tiny space, mingling with the aromatic scent of spices and the warmth of our companionship. We shared not only our material possessions, but also the bond of friendship – understanding, empathy and a shoulder to lean on when life took its toll on us.

In our simple room, where everything overlapped and intertwined, we created a home that felt larger than life itself. It was a place where joy, struggles and dreams knew no boundaries, one where two hearts, though confined by physical limitations, were boundless in their capacity to love, support and uplift one another.

In the Bible, the Book of Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" Our room may have been small, but our unity made it feel like a place where immeasurable goodness and sweetness dwelt.

This chapter of my life, with Alpha as my friend and roommate, taught me that the true essence of home lies not in the size of the space, but in the quality of the connections we forge within it.

As my son joined me following my mother's visit, when she was

heading to the women's conference, I realized the importance of family and the need for me to have my daughter present with us as well. She had been facing numerous challenges at her boarding school, and I decided it was time for her to join us and attend a day school.

My dear friend Alpha and I shared this vision. We knew that to accommodate my daughter and provide for our growing family, we needed to acquire more space. Together, we mustered the courage to approach our landlord and request an additional room.

With hope in our hearts and determination in our footsteps, we made our humble plea to our landlord, who, understanding the depth of our need and importance of the issue in hand, granted our request. This was the beginning of a new chapter in our lives.

Now, with two rooms at our disposal, our lives expanded along with our living space. One of the rooms became our sanctuary, where our family rested, laughed and shared the joys and challenges of life. It was our bedroom, a place filled with warmth and the dreams we held dear to our hearts.

The second room, in its newfound role, became a storage area, a place where we kept our belongings and the memories we cherished. It was the keeper of our past and the guardian of our future.

During these changes, I took on another responsibility – my younger brother, Godwin, was starting his journey as a Form One student, and I was determined to support him in his pursuit of education. Alpha too, ever the generous soul, opened her heart to her nephew, Tumsifu, who had also come for further studies. The two shared the second room.

Waking up in the morning, getting my children ready for school, and spending quality time with them at home felt like a true blessing. I didn't dwell on the fact that we didn't own much; instead, I cherished the joy of simply being with them. They were my driving force, and everything I did was motivated by my desire to provide them with the education I never got the chance to acquire, and with that, a life different from the one I had experienced.

Before I moved to Mwanza, there was a chapter in my life filled with love and a promise of marriage. I had a boyfriend who had asked for my hand, and I had joyfully accepted. We dreamt of building a life together, and he talked about discussing our future with his father, seeking for his blessings before we could proceed further.

The day came when he shared that he had indeed spoken to his father about us, and that plans were in motion for our families to finally meet. It was a time meant for introductions to take place, discussions about dowry and ultimately, the plans of a wedding. The future seemed bright and full of possibilities.

But then, everything changed when I raised a question that changed the course of our story: "Did you tell your father that I have two children?" His answer, stunned me, to say the least. He hadn't mentioned my children to his father, and on top of that, he proposed something I could never have anticipated.

He suggested that we hand my children to his childless aunt, a woman who had been married for over two decades without experiencing the joys of motherhood. His plan was to make a secret pact, an agreement never to reveal the truth to anyone. By doing this, he believed that his father would never discover the existence of my children, and that we could move forward and start a new family together. One where my two children would not be a part of.

In that moment, it felt like I was speaking to a stranger, not the man I thought I knew so well as to agree to get married to. My love for my children was unwavering, an unbreakable bond that defined who I was. The very reason I had come to Mwanza in the first place, the reason I had started this journey to build a new life, was to be with my children, to cherish each moment together with them, in the future I had been working so hard to sculpt into perfection.

To me, a marriage without my children was a marriage without purpose. I had found happiness in the simple joys of life, with the little we had, as long as I had my kids by my side. In their laughter and love,



I discovered a wealth of happiness that no dowry or wedding could ever replace.

In the Book of Psalms 127:3, it is written: "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him." This truth was engraved in my heart, and no sacrifice or compromise could change it. My journey was one of love, resilience and of a mother's unwavering commitment to her children, no matter the challenges life presented.

Alpha wasn't just a friend; she was family to me. Her presence in my life was like a comforting embrace, a constant source of strength and support. Our bond ran so deep that my children, who held her in the highest regard, often wondered about her family ties.

Fast forward to when my son started his secondary school education, he couldn't help but get curious. He would often ask whether Alpha was somehow related to his grandma, my mother, given the fact that Alpha's mom and mine, their grandma, weren't sisters. It was a moment that called for an explanation. I sat my children down and shared the story of our friendship, assuring them that Alpha wasn't a relative by blood, but she was family in every other sense.

### **My Kids Meeting their Father**

When my son was in fourth grade and his sister in form one, I thought it was due time to share with them some truths about their father and why we weren't living together anymore. It had been about nine or ten years since we split, and during that time, I focused on nothing else but taking care of myself and my kids. I remember one evening in Mwanza, I took them out for dinner at a hotel by the lake, at Capri point. After our meal, as we conversed about why we weren't living with their dad, I took the liberty to open up about the hard truth.

Following that instance, my son, having grappled what I had laid on them, took it upon himself and urged his sister to keep the truth of the matter between us and not share it with anyone else. As painful as it was to watch and to admit, he clearly struggled with the truth as a child

who often asked about his dad.

Five years past that moment, when my son was in form two, I felt it was time for them to reunite with their father after a long while. Despite our separation, he was still their dad, and I believed it was their right to get to know him. Even though he had never shown interest in our whereabouts, I wanted to do what I thought was best for my kids. I wanted to be the one to introduce them to their father, and not have someone else do it, instead. So, I discussed it with them, and with their consent, we planned a trip for when school was out. We were living in Arusha at the time, so we had to organize a visit back to my village, which was closer to their father's. I reached out to his cousin to make our intentions clear, which were simply for the kids to reunite with their dad. I also wanted to ensure that their father wouldn't feel pressured or ashamed, which is why said plans had to be made without his knowledge, just so we could avoid any inconvenience that would ruin what I had envisioned for the day, such as the father of my children backing out on us, that being the case, I made sure his cousin understood the purpose of our visit, and that he would confirm their father's presence for when the day arrived.

After finally reaching out to my kids' father's cousin, their uncle that is, I learned that the father of my kids was away in another city dealing with personal matters. However, if we were really set on seeing him, the cousin declared that we'd have to send him bus fare so he could return home for the visit to be deemed possible. That being the case, I sent the cousin the money for the bus fare, like he had asked me to, which he then sent to the father of my children, and we patiently waited until the father of my children confirmed his journey back to their home town.

As I recall, it was a period when political campaigns were taking place, and the cousin to the father of my children, the one I was in contact with, was running for the position of a ward councilor. He used his political intent to lure his cousin, the father of my children, back to their home town, with the excuse that he could use the help, an extra hand in running his campaign, just so the meeting with him and my two kids could take place.

Once everything was set, we arranged to meet at a hotel. I was accompanied by my brother-in-law (my sister's husband), my friend, Alpha, and my two kids. We got there first and found a table to sit at as we waited for their arrival. When the father of my kids finally arrived with his cousin, he had no idea who he was coming to see. The cousin had just told him to tag along, stating that there were people he needed to meet at the hotel.

When they arrived, the cousin greeted us, and then the father of my children recognized me and my brother-in-law. However, he didn't know the rest of our group—our kids and my friend, Alpha. To make things simpler, I introduced Alpha as my sister-in-law, saying I was married to her brother.

After greeting me and pointing out that I hadn't changed one bit, he noticed his cousin pulling up a chair and gesturing for him to sit. He was clearly puzzled by what was going on. Right then, his cousin dropped the bombshell on him: "I wasn't the one who wanted to see you when I called you to come back home for two days, but rather your two kids."

He was stunned to say the least. "My kids!?" His hands trembled, and he seemed to be at a loss for words. He hadn't even recognized them when they greeted him upon arrival. He turned to them, trying to recall their names. He remembered my son, Emmanuel, but he struggled to remember my daughter's name, even though she was the eldest. It was heartbreaking for her; she had been looking forward to meeting her father, only to find out he couldn't even remember her name.

The last time he had seen them, my son was just a year old, and now he was in form two, while my daughter was three years old back then. He looked completely baffled, like he wished the ground would open up and swallow him whole. He seemed to be on the verge of running off, but courtesy of the load of information dropped on him, he was frozen still in place. The kids sat there silently, unsure of what to say. It was a painful moment for him, or so it seemed, but especially for my daughter, realizing that he couldn't even at the very least remember

her name.

Since it was in the evening when we met, we agreed to visit his home the next morning so the kids could see where he lived. Word must have spread fast, because soon after we arrived, relatives and neighbors started coming over. It felt like a surprise, even though I had made all the arrangements prior, to ensure my kids could meet their father. Within an hour, his place was flooded with people of all kinds who had come to see us.

During our visit, a pastor also came by, and he remarked that what he was witnessing was truly a miracle. He said it was rare for someone to make the effort to bring their own children to meet their father, when the father himself wasn't contributing anything to their lives.

In between our conversations, I explained to him that my main goal for orchestrating everything up to that point was for the kids to meet him and see where he lived, so that in the future, if ever they wanted to visit, they would know where to find him. I felt I had done my part in facilitating this meeting. I hoped it would be a chance for the kids to ask any questions they had, but they remained silent the entire time. I also thought about bringing up the topic of why he had been so brutal to us before, but I decided against it since it didn't seem like the right moment.

We stayed for about two hours, but with more and more people arriving, we decided it was time to leave

Despite asking for the kids' phone numbers, their father didn't reach out to them much after that day. Then, one random day in December of that same year, not long after our visit, he called my daughter and asked for hers and her brother's shoe sizes so he could buy them Christmas shoes. She excitedly sent him their shoe sizes, excited for what he would bring them, but after that call, there was no further communication from him. Neither shoes were brought for them, nor pencils nor pens, or anything else for that matter, nothing at all. Unbothered by such an instance, my kids and I just carried on with our lives as usual, making the best of what we already had.

## **Crossroads of Love: Navigating Change for Family**

Life is a journey, full of twists and turns, and sometimes it presents us with changes we could never have foreseen. One such significant change was looming around, ready to test the resilience that lay within.

It was the NGO office, the place where I had dedicated three years of my life to, that unveiled this life-altering decision. They had chosen to relocate, not just to any place, but to the vibrant city of Dar es Salaam. This revelation sent waves of uncertainty and challenges through my world, especially when I considered the welfare of my two precious children.

At that time, we were all living together in Mwanza, a place that had become our home. The idea of uprooting and moving to Dar es Salaam, to start afresh in a city filled with both promises and risks, was a heavy burden on my heart. I had been to Dar es Salaam before, felt the heat, heard the noise of the city, and experienced the endless traffic jams that filled its streets.

The weight of this decision was not merely about relocating; it was more about the future of my children. How would I manage work in this new, unfamiliar place while ensuring that my children received the education they deserved and returned home safely after school? The responsibility of being both a mother and protector pressed heavily on my mind.

In the face of such an immense change, I found myself at a crossroad, forced to make one of the most difficult decisions I ever had to make in my life. After much contemplation and soul-searching, I chose to stay in Mwanza. It was a decision rooted in the love and care I held for my children, a decision to ensure their well-being and a chance at a stable life above everything else.

In the Book of Proverbs 3:5-6, it is written: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways

submit to him, and he will make your paths straight". Trusting in the path I had chosen for myself and my children, even amidst life's uncertainties, was evidence to the unfaltering love of a mother, one willing to make any sacrifice for the wellbeing of her family.

## **From Shadows to Sunlight**

In the peaceful town of Nyegezi, life unfolded with the gentle grace like that of a peaceful river, its currents marked by the sweet laughter of children at play. Among them was my son, a lively four-year-old, a bundle of boundless energy whose laughter was the very melody of our days. Little did we suspect that on a day that began like any other, fate would cast a looming shadow over our lives.

My little boy, like a brief of joy, dashed around the yard, joining the other children in their delightful games. Their innocence and the genuine happiness they spread warmed our hearts. But life in its uncertainties has a way of surprising us, throwing curveballs when we least anticipate it.

As the children reveled in their games, a mere coin, found its way into my son's small hand. Children have a weird tendency of being drawn to the most ordinary of things, and just like that, this coin sparked a sense of curiosity in his young soul. What happened next, though, unraveled like a scene from a bad dream.

Unexpectedly, that coin slipped from his grasp and made its way into his mouth. Time appeared to stand still as pure fear overtook us. His breath was suddenly ragged, blocked by the intrusion of that small coin. Desperately, we tried everything that came to mind to dislodge it, pounding his back, our trembling fingers attempting to reach inside his mouth, but nonetheless, our efforts were futile.

With each passing second, the chilling reality became evident: the coin had slipped down into his stomach. Our worst fears seemed to have manifested, and it felt like the beginning of a torturous nightmare.

Desperation guided our every move as we rushed him to the hospital. In those halls, the doctor's words hung heavily in the air, worrying and agonizing. "I'm giving you a period of two days. Make sure he eats plenty of papaya and vegetables, and if the coin doesn't emerge with his stool, we will have no choice but to perform surgery on him."

Leaving the hospital with those words haunting my mind, I was faced with a daunting challenge. *"How could I ensure that a coin would find its way out of my son's body through his natural bodily functions?"* The doctor's advice became my lifeline in the midst of this storm, and I held onto it with solid hope.

Back at home, I knew that the coming days would demand nothing less of vigilance and determination. I had to monitor every single one of my son's bathroom routes, ready to inspect his stool for any sign of the coin. The prospect was overwhelming, but as a mother, I was prepared to go to great lengths to protect my child.

The first day went by with nothing but a sense of heavy anticipation. The coin remained elusive, and my son's innocence remained untouched, completely contrast to the unrest in my heart. The second day brought no change as well, and the hours seemed to speed by as anxiety weighed heavily on my thoughts.

As the third day arrived, the thought of impending surgery lingered over us, casting a dark cloud upon our lives. The estimated time was running out. I knew that if the coin failed to reveal itself in my son's stool, we would have to face the terrifying prospect of surgery.

Then, something I would not describe as anything else but a ray of hope that penetrated through the stormy clouds happened, my son announced his need to visit the bathroom. My heart raced as I approached the potty, a mixture of hope and dread coursing through my veins. When I lifted the lid and looked inside, tears of relief welled up in my eyes.

There, in the thick of the stool, lay the coin that had tormented our minds for days. It was blackened and stained, a bitter reminder of the

ordeal we had endured. Yet, in that moment, the coin's appearance was secondary. What truly mattered was the overwhelming sense of relief that washed over me.

As I gazed at that small, dirty piece of metal, I couldn't help but think of the comforting words of the Bible, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want", from the Book of Psalm 23:1. In our darkest hour, when we faced the fear of the possibility of a costly surgery and the uncertainty of how we would afford it, if ever my son needed to undergo such a procedure, we were granted a miracle. It was a reminder that even in our most trying times, we were not alone. That God was always watching over us.

The coin, once instilling fear, had become a beacon of hope and faith. It acted as proof to the power of prayer. My son's recovery afterwards was swift, and as I watched him play with his friends once more, my heart swelled with gratitude.

Our pockets may have been empty, but our family was immensely rich in love, and we were guided through the darkest of times by a higher power. As the sun set in Nyegezi on that day, I knew that we were truly blessed beyond measure.

## **Faith and Hustle**

In the following inscribed chapters of my life, a verse from the Book of Psalm 30:5 resonates softly, a scripture that enunciates of the favor that comes forth as a result of endurance. Through every twist and turn, this favor guided me to unexpected places, like Lake Medium School and St. Mary's School in Mwanza, where my journey met challenges that only faith could navigate.

A promise, stringed with determination, anchored my decisions: my children would not tread the halls of government schools; they deserved the privilege of private school education. Yet, the taunting obstacle of tuition fees burdened me. Armed with nothing but faith, I approached the Head-teachers of these esteemed schools, laying bare



my financial struggles. I couldn't boast of wealth, but my heart was rich with a vow, with a sincerity borne of desperation. I would explain my situation, acknowledging my minimal earnings, and expressing my earnest desire for my children to receive a quality education. I would request a waiver, promising that before the year ended, the tuition fees would be settled.

To my relief, these educators, individuals with kind souls, felt the sincerity of my plea and granted my request. With a heart filled with gratitude, I made good on my promise, ensuring that the fees were settled before the final chapter of the school year came around. Blessings be upon those educators who extend a helping hand to those in need. Who in their own ways become vessels of hope, guiding individuals like myself through the stormy seas of financial hardship, proving that faith and compassion can light the way even in the darkest of times.

The school fees, an astounding amount of TZS. 680,000 per child for a school year at Lake Medium back in those days, stood as a formidable mountain in my path, but regardless, I stood my ground, resilient in the face of the daunting challenge. The dance of numbers on my bank deposit slips was a curiosity provoking sight – amounts like TZS. 5,000, 10,000 and 15,000, mere fragments of a daring promise I had made to the educators of the school my kids attended. I'd approach the bank counter with determination, depositing whatever small sum I could manage. I could almost sense the silent queries in the minds of the bank staff as they processed slips with amounts that seemed unreal for typical school fees payments.

Collecting the slips from the bank was a ritual laden with a weighty responsibility. I guarded them as one would guard precious artifacts, unwilling to entrust even a single TZS. 5,000 slips to my children, understanding the magnitude of setbacks a loss of even a single one could bring. Through this uncommon financial ballet, I persevered, honoring my word and ensuring that, against all odds, the fees were paid in full within each school year. My pact with the school was simple but profound: my children would be protected from the threat of dismissal or warning notices due to unpaid fees, sparing them the

burden of financial anxieties they didn't have to endure at their tender age.

The pinch of paying school fees, or perhaps my unwavering commitment to my children's education, fueled my relentless involvement in their academic journey. I was a familiar face at every school event – Parents' Day, report card collection during semester closures, even regular check-ins with their respective subject teachers. I became a presence so known that practically every teacher recognized me, ready to offer support and guidance whenever my kids and I needed it.

In order to add to my modest income, which constantly juggled on the edge of meeting the demands of private education and hiring a nanny to assist me with childcare, I delved into additional ventures to earn some extra cash to meet my needs and those of my children. The alarm clock's relentless buzz at 3:00 AM everyday marked the start of a daily routine – preparing foods like chapati, donuts and boiled eggs. These simple delights became my lifeline, sustaining my children and providing them with something to carry to school.

Amid the verge of struggles and sacrifices, I clung to the solace of the scripture from the Book of Psalm 30:5. With faith as my guide and love as my compass, I navigated the turbulent waters of life. Driven by a fierce sense of determination, I steered towards the promise of a brighter future for my beloved children.

## **Hustling through Unpredictable Ventures**

Life's twists and turns often lead us down unexpected paths, and my journey took me through the challenges of an office kitchen – selling chapati, mandazi and eggs, where such breakfast delicacies could be both a joy and an inconvenience, especially when fellow colleagues normalized ignoring debts that had to be settled. I kept a book, carefully noting down the names of colleagues who feasted on those morning treats. While some made instant payments, others let their debts accumulate. How I wish I had that book now; I would start

collecting those long-forgotten debts with a bit of interest.

Regardless of the struggle that came with picking up ways to make extra money, my hustle didn't stop there. Amidst said twists and turns, another chapter of my life prevailed, with me investing in vending sweet bananas, which I acquired whenever a ship arrived in town from a region called Bukoba, a place known for the production and abundance of said food. Patience was key as I waited for these fruits to ripen, a valuable I would later sale to my colleagues and neighbors.

In this newfound endeavor, destiny led me to a colleague whose spouse was a security guard at the port's gates. The security guard, in his good and kind nature, also introduced me to a cart driver, an essential link in my quest to transport the bananas from the port to my home. These local wooden cart owners had their questionable habits; some were operated by individuals battling their own demons, making the journey to desired destination a wild and unpredictable ride. As they pushed these carts with astonishing speed, my heart raced with worry alongside them. Would they deliver my precious bananas to my home safely? Or would they disappear on me to God knows where with all the bananas I had purchased to resell, causing me distress and loss.

I remember those moments as clear as day, chasing after the cart driver from the port gates, which stood closer to the central police station in Mwanza, all the way to Mlango Mmoja, my area of residence at the time. My focus was just on the bananas in transit and nothing but that, and my prayers were a constant companion on that chaotic journey, an intense plea that all that I had purchased would make it home intact.

Through the benefits of undertaking this venture, not only was I able to put food on the table, but also my children gained access to fresh fruits, a simple luxury in our lives. Regardless of the fact that, most of the time, I didn't have a choice but to sell the best of the batch and reserve the slightly damaged or smaller ones for my children to enjoy. Such is the story of our life, where every opportunity and every challenge became a part of our existence, crafting a sense of resilience and determination, much like the many characters found in the course

of our lives.

On my quest to earn a living for my family, two days a week, as it dawned, I would embark on a journey to the lakeshore of Kamanga, where the boats from a place called Ukerewe would set ashore. They carried sweet potatoes; another means of sustenance.

During these early morning ventures, I was blessed with the company and unfaltering support of my brother, Godwin. Together, we faced the darkness of the early mornings, bound by purpose. He was dedicated to his secondary education, as I was equally committed to securing our livelihood.

In sincerity, those early mornings were not always gentle. It was solely the grace of God that sustained us, a shield from the dangers of that era. The streets around the area we resided, particularly near Salma Cone and Mwanza Hotel, were packed with street children, their eyes holding an array of unpredictability. Armed with razor blades and knives, they always seemed to be on the edge of violence. Looking back, I am humbled by the divine protection that guided our steps. Our strength alone was not enough to see us through those trying moments.

Remarkably, I was not always alone in my quest for sweet potatoes, among other things I ventured on. Other buyers too, would gather, with similar ambition to seize the opportunity. Even before the boats docked on shore, we treaded into the waters close to the shore, each staking a claim, and shouting, “These are mine”! The negotiations with the sellers, predominantly women, followed afterwards. On such days, prices inflated due to high demand.

Once we secured the sweet potatoes, we would load them onto a cart and start our journey back home, aiming to reach our doorstep by 6:00 AM, leaving us enough time to carry on with the rest of our schedules for the day. Outside our humble home, we displayed our newfound treasures in small portions of 4 to 5, each price carefully weighed by the cost of the purchase. At times, I knocked on doors, a mere hawker offering a price to potential customers. The needs of my family were what fueled my persistence. My children’s education and my

brother's dreams served as a compass, guiding me through life's maze.

As I navigate towns today, I see women gracefully balancing trays on their heads, a representation of tireless merchants. Their footsteps drag my thoughts back to those humble beginnings, where perseverance was carved into the marrow of my bones.

Selling sweet potatoes and other goods was no walk in the park I can assure you. Picture yourself knocking on someone's door or gate, only to be met with an inquiry from within the house, with no one in sight. "Who is it, and what do you want!?" You'd have no choice but to muster some sort of an explanation, "I am here to sell sweet potatoes", all that effort, only to be dismissed with a curt, "We don't need any". Life itself, without formal customer service training, teaches the art of persuasion. Even when potential buyers weren't initially interested, you'd have to make an effort to plead your case - sweet potatoes weren't just any meal; they were a necessity. "Alright, maybe next time", you'd respond, and return to try your luck some other day. This was the fade and flow of my life back then.

In the grand pages of life's injustices, even then, some interested buyers would borrow sweet potatoes from me and proceed to never pay their debts, sometimes taking away a whole day's profit out of what they owed me. These were the characters I met along the way. But among the thorns, I found roses - most neighbors were very supportive, paying their dues in time and offering words of encouragement alongside it.

Life has a way of leading us down unknown paths, and my journey took a surprising turn when I ventured into the world of selling second-hand bedsheets. What remains drawn in my heart is the constant favor that graced each one of my endeavors, as well as the remarkable souls I met and collaborated with along the way. Despite the constraints of my inadequate finances, I always managed to figure things out.

In Mlango Mmoja, I crossed paths with a kindred spirit, one who unwrapped bundles of bedsheets and curtains. This fortunate encounter made it possible for me to handpick the bedsheets of my

choice, often opting for top-quality pieces. Payment to said person would be deferred until after I had resold them. To offer these bedsheets at a reasonable price, I took it upon myself to wash and iron them prior, restoring their shine, and only then would I present them to potential customers at double the cost of purchase.

Sometimes, when I stumbled upon king-size bedsheets, I would carefully cut a portion of them to create pillowcases. It was a small but ingenious touch that added a layer of value to the product, therefore allowing me to ask for a higher price. To my dear customers, many of whom may not have realized how much I valued their support at the time, I remain eternally grateful. They would often reach out to me for more bedsheets, and it was their unwavering loyalty that lifted my spirit.

Beyond merely becoming a source of income, this bedsheet business also ensured that my home was secured with lovely bedsheets for my family to use, a touch of luxury amidst life's endless challenges. Occasionally, it even meant I had extra pairs to share with others. It was a tribute to the goodness that flows between people, the unspoken kindness and generosity that brightens the path for those of us treading through life's sophisticated paths.

As the scripture from the Book of Luke 6:38 states, "Give, and it will be given to you". I figured that when you give your best, life often finds a way to return the favor to you in the least expected and heartwarming ways. That chapter of my life was a testimony to this truth, where the simple act of selling bedsheets became a story of grace, resilience and the beauty that can emerge from life's most unexpected twists.

Further along the road, I had the privilege of being introduced to a lady who engaged herself in the business of selling clothes, and in her, I found a partner who understood the ups and downs of life's financial tides. With her, I could select items and claim them without immediate payment, sell them, and return later to settle the bill.

My focus on this new venture was on men's shirts. When sold for cash,

each shirt earned me a profit of TZS. 2,000. However, if the buyer opted to pay me at the end of the month, the profit would double to TZS. 5,000. Selling 20 shirts in a month became my target, a tangible goal that would not only put food on the table for my family, but also ensure I could cover my house help's salary, along with the conventional water and electricity bills.

Around this period, my sister also embarked on her own clothing business, and as a result, I seized the opportunity to expand my collection. I dealt with children's clothing as well, the Christmas season being a specific focus. I began taking orders from parents looking to dress their little ones for the holidays. They would specify their desires, and I would set out to source or purchase the garments that matched their needs.

I specifically remember one customer's request. He was seeking a dress for his daughter and explained, "His size will fit her", referring to my son. It was an easy way out – my son, who was of about five years old at the time, would have to try on the dress. Little did I anticipate the battle of willpower that followed next! He reluctantly refused, tears streaming down his face, as he protested that we were trying to dress him in girls' clothing. I was caught in a dilemma, torn between my son's resistance and the pressing need for the money that I would earn from fulfilling this order. In the end, we had to estimate the size, and lucky enough, I made the sale.

Life's winding path often throws us unexpected challenges, leaving us with decisions to make. In those moments, I leaned on my faith and the belief that everything happens for a reason. As the scripture from the Book of Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding". I may not have fully comprehended the reasons behind such trials, but I pressed forward with firm determination, knowing that each step brought me closer to being able to provide for my family and secure a brighter future for my children.

As we journeyed through the chapters of our endeavors, new opportunities presented themselves. It was during this time that my

sister-in-law, a wife to my cousin, Jane Rose, painted a vision for us. She suggested a venture that would take us to a certain village in Shinyanga, a place known for its poultry farming, specifically chickens. Our path was paved with the promise of a contact who would procure these chickens from the village and transport them to Mwanza for us by bus. But to embark on this newfound journey, we had to make a choice—a loan from a local savings and credit cooperative society (SACCOS), would have to be secured for us to fund this venture. At that time, I was employed at the Bugando University of Health and Allied Sciences, whose name was later changed to Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS). The SACCOS from which we borrowed our capital was a workers' union, an organization of fellow employees.

The plan was simple: Jane Rose and I would have to secure orders from hotels, prompting us to deliver the fresh chickens directly to them upon arrival. But life often has a way of throwing a curveball when we least expect it. The bus transporting the chickens arrived long past the agreed-upon delivery time, a delay that set our plans into a haze. When they reached our destination, the chickens were not in their best shape. Some had perished due to the tiring journey, leaving us to deal with an unsettling mystery—was it the hunger and fatigue from the lengthy travel, or were they suffering from some undetected illness beforehand?

Faced with a difficult decision, Jane Rose and I were left with no other recourse. With heavy hearts, we chose to end the suffering of the weakened chickens, which amounted to half of our entire order. That evening, our family would have to dine on the chickens we could not sell due to the nature of their quality. The following day, we had no option but to sell the remaining chickens at the same price we had purchased them for, despite their deteriorating weight. Desperation had a firm grip on our choices. The weight of repaying the loan was a burden that hung heavily upon us. I distinctly remember the countless visits from SACCOS' officials, from where we had secured the loan to start the business, their serious expressions a constant reminder of our commitment. They even delivered a summons, informing us that a police case had been filed against us. It was without doubt a period



that posed one of the most challenging phases of my life, as far as I can recall.

Despite all that we had gone through, with every passing day, we mustered the strength to face the obstacles life presented before us. Slowly but resolutely, Jane Rose and I worked to repay the loan. And as the days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, the weight upon our shoulders began to subdue. The lessons learned in the trial of this experience etched deep within me. I knew that if I were to delve into the world of selling chickens once more, I would do so with a greater degree of professionalism, much unlike the first time, and hopefully without the need to secure a loan. I would rely on the resources readily available to me, fostering a future that was built on the lessons of the past.

### **Small Joys and Confidence in Motherhood**

Each day as it dawned, I prepared my little boy for school. Since I couldn't afford a car, and the thought of a taxi ride was but a distant dream, one I also couldn't afford, neither didn't stop me from feeling proud and grateful as I wrapped my son on my back with a kitenge. My comforting embrace meant to ensure he felt safe and cherished.

As I hoisted him onto my back, I would take in his scent, an attestation of his childhood innocence. The weight of his small frame was nothing compared to the weight of the dreams I had envisioned for him. With each step, we set about a journey that was both physical and metaphorical, a mother's steadfast commitment to her child's future.

Upon arriving at the nursery school's gate at which he attended, the world painted a vivid contrast before us. Other children stepped out of cars, the soft purr of engines fading into the distance. Some arrived on foot, their tiny hands clutching their parents' fingers, but there I stood, my son on my back, the embodiment of resilience in the face of life's disparities.

Regardless of the nature of our circumstances, what mattered most was

the love attached into that daily ritual. My son's eyes sparkled with excitement as he greeted his friends, oblivious to the material differences that separated our worlds.

"Bye, mama", he would cheerfully call out, his voice a blend of love, trust and belonging. Something that made all those early mornings routines worth every second.

In those moments, I understood that love knows no boundaries. It transcends the superficial and embraces the profound. My son, carried on my back through his pre-school years, was, in his own way, learning the values of perseverance and the importance of unconditional love.

As I walked back home, I recalled the verse from the Book of Proverbs 22:6, which states, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it". By tirelessly going about that same routine with my son every waking day, I knew that I was teaching my son more than just how to get to school. I was instilling in him the enduring qualities of love, resilience and the belief that no matter where we start at, we can reach the highest peaks.

In those moments of simplicity and warmth, I found immeasurable richness. To the world, I may have seemed like just a mother carrying her son on her back, but to me, that simple act was the embodiment of hope, determination and the promise of a brighter future. And in my son's cheerful "bye mama", I sensed a love that went far beyond the ordinary and bound us together in an unbreakable bond.

Life with my kids was a remarkable adventure, filled with simple pleasures that brought us joy. We had our special days for pampering with ice cream, and as simple as those moments may have seemed, they were precious beyond measure. Our journey began in Mlango Mmoja, where I would save up just enough money to indulge in this sweet treat with my children whenever possible.

From our humble home, we'd walk to a place called Salma Cone, a little ice cream shop that felt like a treasure trove. The anticipation of

those scoops of delight was intense in the air. Each with our ice cream in hand, we'd stroll to our favorite spot by the lakeside, near Capri Point. It was a place where time somehow seemed to slow down, and laughter reverberated in the breeze.

Here, my children would revel in the fun of playing in the water and sand. Their giggles were the sweetest sounds to my ears, and the sparkle in their eyes outshone that of the glistening Lake Victoria. Our expeditions to the beach, one without the confines of fences, allowed us the freedom to roam as far as our imaginations would take us.

On one particular day, as we were on our way back home after our customary ice cream and lake adventure, life had a surprise in store for us. We encountered a man who seemed to be struggling with his own mind – mentally ill. He wandered aimlessly, muttering to himself, lost in his own thoughts.

As he approached us, his pace quickening with each step he took closer to us, I was caught in a dilemma. *'Should I risk running? Would I be putting my children in harm's way by doing so?'* The fear was evident, but in no way was I going to let it get a hold of me. It was in that moment, when I, as a mother, felt the weight of responsibility. As I was still trying to wrap my head around the situation, my son found a stick, I couldn't even comprehend when or where he had picked it up from.

With my heart pounding vehemently against my chest, I hastily snatched that stick from his hand and stood my ground. I mustered every ounce of courage I could, and with unfaltering confidence, I threatened the man, "Come closer, and you will see what a woman can do to you today!" My children clung to me, their tiny hands clutching my clothes, their trust in me unrelenting.

I locked eyes with the man, my own inner turmoil hidden behind a facade of strength. In that tense moment, something within him seemed to shift. He suddenly slowed his pace, and that's when bystanders began to take notice of the situation. Encouraged by the support of those around us, I stood my ground.

The man, who had initially approached my children and I with erratic determination, began to retreat, his head bowed in a display of fear more profound than our own. It was a moment of triumph, not because of our physical strength, but because of the weight of conviction that seemed to weigh on him, and also due to the belief in our own power.

Looking back on that incident, I realized the profound lesson it held. It wasn't about how others perceived me, or the adversity we faced, but about how *I* perceived myself. Whether or not I believed in myself enough to deal with the situation. In the mirror, I didn't see a woman who succumbed to fear, but rather one who stood unyielding, ready to protect her children however terrified I was myself. Perception is a remarkable aspect; all it takes is a shift in your mindset to change it and that's about it.

In those days, when resources were scarce and my children depended on me for everything, I learned an important lesson about the essence of joy. It was all hinged on how we perceived life's small pleasures, and not what we were lacking. The way we looked at them and the love we poured into them.

I made it a point to take my children to the upscale hotels in Mwanza. Why? You may wonder, when our means of livelihood were limited. I wanted my kids to experience being in such places, to understand that the world was not limited to a select few. I desired for them to be able to confidently say, "We've been there too", when someone spoke of a hotel, a restaurant or any fancy dining place.

To make this possible, I came up with a strategy. Before we set out on our grand hotel adventures, I ensured that they had a full meal at home prior. They knew the rule - if they didn't finish their meal, they wouldn't get to go. It was a lesson meant to instill in them a sense of gratitude and appreciation. As a mother, I wanted them to savor the atmosphere, the environment and the experience, instead of focusing on what we couldn't afford. I wanted them to learn how to remain content in the midst of the simple life we led.

Today, when my children recall those times, there's a hint of playful complaint in their voices. They sometimes complain that it wasn't entirely fair, that I should have taken them to these places and just let them savor the hotel food, instead of having them eat rice and beans before our visit to a place as fancy as Tilapia Hotel, among others.

Regardless of their claims, that was beside the point. It was never about the food or the extravagance such places had to offer, but rather about the journey, the experience and the values I was instilling upon them. The taxi fare alone from our home to the hotel may have been TZS. 2,000/- or TZS. 2,500/- back then, which to be fair, wasn't much, but it was a challenge to gather that amount at times.

In those moments, I felt like a steward of joy. I was teaching my children to appreciate the little we had, to make the most of every opportunity, and to treasure the moments we spent together more than anything else. It was an investment in their character, in their outlook on life.

And as I reflect on those days, I'm reminded of the scripture from the Book of Ecclesiastes 3:13 which states, "Moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God". Those experiences were indeed a gift, not just of food and place, but of the opportunity to grasp a thing or two about perspective and gratitude.

In the grand hotels of Mwanza, we found joy not in fancy hotel food, but rather in each other's company, in the laughter, and in the warmth of shared moments. It was a lesson in cherishing the simple pleasures life had to offer, a legacy of love passed down from one generation to the next.

## **Sundays of Simplicity and Aspiring to Uplift**

Sundays were a blessing in our lives, a break in the routines we adopted to during week days, a day when we could value the simple pleasures that made life feel exquisitely rich. On those cherished Sundays, the kitchen would come alive with the mouth-watering

aroma of spices and that of boiling rice.

Our focus was on the steaming pot of spiced rice, a dish locally known as pilau. It was one that held the essence of tradition, of family and of the love that flowed from our hearts into every grain of rice in that pot. The heart of our recipe was the spices, meticulously chosen and blended, each one adding its unique touch to the range of flavors. We'd roast the spices until their fragrance enveloped the kitchen in warmth and anticipation.

While some would say that meat was the most essential part of a pilau, we, who learned to live by and appreciate whatever we could afford at the moment, knew better. It wasn't, in fact, a necessity we couldn't live without. We'd cook our pilau with or without meat, knowing that the essence of the dish lay in the spices and the diligence we put into preparing it.

Served as an accompaniment to our pilau, we'd prepare a side of salad, a "kachumbari", that was as delicious as it was refreshing. The fine mixture of fresh tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, cilantro and a squeeze of lemon juice created a burst of color and flavor that was the perfect complement to the pilau's richness.

These were the days when we truly appreciated what we had. We didn't need lavish feasts or extravagant ingredients to deem life worthy. Instead, we celebrated the beauty of simplicity, the joy of being together and most of all, the love that pervaded as we shared every meal. It was a reminder of the values that shaped our family, the moments that bound us and the blessings we held close to our hearts.

Our Sunday meal, the pilau, was indeed a gift, a reminder that joy could be found in the simplest of pleasures, and that love, when shared around a table, could transform a simple meal into a cherished memory.

I remember one particular incident from the days when we resided in Mlango Mmoja, a story that never fails to bring a smile to my face, one that later became a memorable chapter in the story of my life and

that of my family. It was the day that our neighbor found her house help, Mariam, standing by the stove, tending to a pot of beans. In most households, that would be an ordinary sight, but in the case of my neighbor, what she walked into was anything but ordinary. With a hint of judgement in her voice, she scolded Mariam, saying, “Mariam! For whom are you cooking beans!? Did you get the impression that we are Kuryans?”

She said it as if 'Kuryans' were a label, a way to categorize us, who so happened to be kuryans, as if we were of a lower class, people who resorted to feasting on meals as basic as beans. She didn't hold back, with an undertone of disdain she uttered thoughtlessly, and she went as far as to say it to our faces.

Our living condition back then was far from luxurious. The houses we could afford to rent were old and small, consisting of the main house at the front with six rooms – three for my family and three for my neighbors'. In between those rooms, was an open space that we used as our shared kitchen. It was a space filled with laughter, the aroma of spices and the clinking of utensils as we prepared our meals.

Despite the limitations of our circumstances, we found contentment in the simplest of dinners. Beans, as it seemed, were a constant dish in our lives, ever present. Whether we ate rice, plantains or sweet potatoes, beans always found their way onto our plates. It wasn't a matter of choice; but rather what we could afford at that time.

Beans became a staple to my family, as a matter of fact, they were a reminder that even amidst financial worries that constantly hovered over us like shadows, and we could still find sustenance and joy in the simplest of meals.

This incident brings to mind the Book of Philippians, chapter 4, verse 12, which states that, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plentifulness and hunger, abundance and need". In those humble moments, we found a deeper understanding of these wise words. We knew how to face scarcity with grace and abundance with

gratitude, always finding the strength to cherish life's simple blessings.

That incident, when our neighbor uttered the term 'Kuryans' with disregard, now serves as a reminder of the resilience that defined our journey. It's a story that brings a smile to my face, not because it didn't inflict on me pain or offence, but because it served as proof to the strength of our spirits and our ability to find joy in the most ordinary of moments.

I remember what it felt like when I bought our first television when we still resided in Mlango Mmoja. It was a huge milestone for me, a significant purchase that filled my heart with a sense of pride and accomplishment. I couldn't help but smile with joy as I made my monthly contributions for the purchase, setting aside TZS. 20,000/-, little by little, to pay for it. It took me the better part of a year, but I finally saved enough to cover the total cost, which amounted to about TZS. 250,000/-. It wasn't a sleek, modern TV, but one of those older models with a back panel, locally referred to as "TV za chogo".

When I brought the TV home after paying it off, my neighbor, the very same neighbor, who had always been like a big sister to me, came over for a visit as she heard the sound of a TV coming from our room. She glanced at the TV and then at me, her eyes filled with curiosity. Her comment, delivered with a hint of sarcasm and a touch of playfulness, remained etched in my memory ever since. She said, "So, this is why you were eating beans everyday – so you could afford to buy a TV?"

Her words were lighthearted, almost as though she was teasing me, but they struck something within me. They made me ponder the choices we make and the judgments we pass on one another. It was clear that she had expected something different from me, perhaps a more conservative approach to spending my hard-earned money. Her comment spoke to her own perceptions of class and status, highlighting the disparities that sometimes define our relationships. At that time, she was in her forties, while I was in my twenties, and the age gap between us only seemed to amplify the difference in our perspectives.



That moment of realization was a turning point in my life. It shaped my outlook and forged a promise within me. I vowed that when I reached her age, I would be the kind of person who encouraged and uplifted others rather than looking down on them. I understood that true wealth wasn't just about material possessions; it was also about the richness of our character and the compassion we extended to those around us.

As I pondered on her comment, I couldn't help but wonder why, despite her age and her supposed social standing, she chose to reside in a place she considered below her class. It served as a reminder that our circumstances in life might shape us, but it's our heart and the way we treat others that truly define us.

This memory remains stamped in my heart, a lesson learned from a simple comment that held a stream of wisdom. It's a reminder that we should never underestimate the power of our words and actions, for they have the capacity to inspire and uplift, or to diminish and divide. In the Book of Proverbs 15:4, it is written: "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit". Those words underscore the enduring truth that kindness and compassion can nurture the human spirit and bridge the gaps that may exist among us.

## **Hardship, Generosity and Resilience**

Life was a long, winding journey, filled with its own shares of trials and tribulations. I can still recall the time when we made the move from Nyegezi to Mlango Mmoja, to a house in town. I had a singular goal in mind: to ensure my children could attend a private school, and that meant living closer to it.

But as we ventured into this new chapter of our lives, it became painfully clear that we were starting from scratch. We didn't have any furniture of our own to fill our new space, and our situation was far from what some would consider ideal.

It was in this moment of need that a friend, a guardian angel in her

own right, extended a helping hand. Vero, my dear friend, lived with her parents and had an eye for opportunity. She had been acquiring second-hand furniture from those looking to part ways with their belongings, often when they were preparing to move to another town.

Vero's generosity became our lifeline. We made use of her old bed and her old wooden couches, even though they were far from the epitome of comfort. These couches, if one could even call them that, were nothing more than hard wooden frames, with barely any cushions to them. We made use of them for almost two years, feeling every unforgiving inch of that solid wood beneath us.

Vero also owned four stools, and these basic pieces of furniture became our makeshift table. It was a simple setup, but it served our needs at the moment. In those moments, as we gathered around our wooden table and shared our stories, I realized that true wealth wasn't measured by the dignity of our possessions, but by the depth of our connections and the love that bound us.

This experience brought to mind the scripture from the Book of Proverbs, 17:17 which states: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity". Vero's friendship was evidence to the relentless power of love and the support we could find in the people who stood by us during our times of need.

As we sat on those hard couches and gathered around our makeshift table, we found solace in each other's company. Our surroundings may have been modest, but our hearts were filled with gratitude and appreciation for the simple blessings that life had to offer.

One fateful day, disaster struck our little world. My son, in the high spirits of childhood, was playing and leaping from one couch to another, as children often do. But in a moment of mishap, he missed a step, causing him to fall and land hard on his arm, which collided with the hard surface of one of those wooden couches. The result was nothing short of a mother's worst fear – his arm was broken.

Panic and anxiety coursed through us as we rushed to Bugando

Hospital. The time seemed to crawl, since it was already around 8:00 pm by the time we reached the hospital's doors. Our hearts were heavy with worry, but we held onto the hope that the medical professionals would soon mend what was broken.

Inside the hospital, we were subjected to a queue, waiting for an X-ray that would reveal the extent of damage to his arm, followed by the application of a cast. Time went by fast as we were at the hospital, until it was well past 2:00am.

The following morning dawned, bringing with it a sense of chaos and disruption. My usual routine had to be set aside so I could focus on caring for my son and helping him navigate his current situation. We were a world away from our usual daily routine, and the journey ahead felt uncertain.

During those times, there were no conveniences like Uber or readily available taxis, especially in the late hours. For this reason, I had no choice but to stand outside the hospital, waiting, in hope that a taxi would arrive, dropping off someone, so we could get a ride home with the taxi. Fortunately for us, that's exactly what happened: we were able to secure a taxi that had come from town to drop off someone heading home late from a night club, and the taxi safely took us home.

My son, with his arm encased in a cast was still the lively, spirited child he had always been. As a result of the incident, he had acquired new scars, not just on his arm but also his face, legs and even his toes. He bore the marks of an energetic child, proof of his zest for life.

During that time, tragedy struck in the form of a train accident in Tanzania. Among others, the train was carrying Seventh Day Adventist singers, including the renowned Christ Ambassadors from Rwanda. The accident claimed many lives and left numerous others injured. I recall how people, in their attempts to lift the mood, playfully asked my son, "Were you also in the train accident?" His body bore scars, but they were scars that told a different story.

Despite the hardships we faced, and the limitations of the life we led;

I understood that I had a debt to repay to Vero for the furniture she let us borrow. I began the process of returning the kindness she had shown us by making regular payments in installments, knowing that it was the only way to make things right.

In these trying times, I found console in the Book of Romans 12:12 which states: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer". Those words offered a guiding light, a reminder to find a spark of hope even in the darkest of times, to be patient in the face of tribulation, and to maintain a steadfast resolve, no matter the challenges that life presented.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Journey to Education**

#### **A Journey of Education, Faith and Family**

Completing my Secretarial studies felt like a meaningful step, but I sensed that my education journey was far from over. Deep within, I believed that to truly enhance my prospects in the job market, I needed to obtain at least a Form Four Certificate. It was a longing for self-improvement that propelled me forward.

During that time, my aunt, Elizabeth, who was working in Bukoba, reached out to check on my progress. Our conversations spanned various aspects of my life, including my education. She posed a recommendation that would alter the course of my journey: "Why not inquire about registering as a private candidate for the Form Two national examinations?" Her idea intrigued me, and in addition to that, she even generously offered to cover the examination fee.

Filled with determination, I set out the next morning to visit Pamba Secondary School, a conveniently located institution on my route to work. I was eager to gather information about the process of registering as a private candidate. The school's academic teacher welcomed me with warmth and encouragement. He recognized the value of being willing to return to school, especially for a person of my age, and guided me through the steps I needed to take.

The process involved obtaining the necessary forms from the District Education Officer's office, attaching these documents to my bank payment receipt for the National Examination Council fees, with an account at NMB Bank. The final step was finding a school that could accommodate private candidates for the exams since not all secondary schools had the facilities to host students in this category.

Equipped with this invaluable knowledge, I reported back to my aunt, who promptly sent me the examination fees. However, since it was already June, I had to pay a penalty due to the initial payment deadline that was set for April. With the financial aspect sorted out, I set off on the next phase of this educational journey.

I registered myself at Mwanza Secondary School, one of the few institutions that accepted private candidates, as Pamba Secondary School was fully enrolled. The path forward was clear, and I was filled with a sense of purpose and determination.

This chapter of my life brings to mind the scripture from the Book of Proverbs 16:3, which states: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." It was a time of commitment and faith, a period in which I entrusted my aspirations to a higher power, the Lord, and took decisive steps toward my educational goals.

As I ventured into the world of education once again, I knew that this journey was not just about earning a certificate. It was about personal growth, resilience and the belief that with determination, even the most ambitious of dreams, those that may seem difficult or impossible to accomplish, could be achieved.

As the days went by, I faced an immense challenge. With only three months left until the examinations commenced, I had to cover all the topics for Form One and Form Two and prepare for the Qualifying Test Examination (QT) set for October 2004. The weight of this task was amplified by the fact that, as a private candidate, I was responsible for my own studies. I couldn't afford the luxury of additional tuition, and time was a ruthless adversary.

Juggling work to earn a living and managing my bedsheets and shirts business to provide for my family was already a demanding endeavor, the stress that came with trying to achieve my educational goals was like the cherry on top. In the midst of this uphill climb, I turned to a family friend, named Mr. Mawazo, who so happened to be a teacher. He saw the determination in my eyes and the fire in my heart, and so he was set on helping me.

Mr. Mawazo introduced me to another remarkable individual, a friend of his, Mr. Wenje. Together, they extended their helping hands to me. In a world where nothing comes without a cost, these two men offered me something priceless – an education. They agreed to teach me for free in four vital subjects: English, History, Geography and Civics. Together, as a team if you will, we set off on an educational journey that would shape my future.

Our study sessions were evidence to our fiery dedication and sense of determination to achieve what we had planned to. We settled for any available space to sit and learn. There was never a fixed schedule, since Mr. Mawazo and Mr. Wenje had their own commitments to fulfill. Yet, they willingly sacrificed their precious time to support me without expecting anything in return. Sometimes, our makeshift classrooms were the verandas of tailor shops or any place that offered shelter.

In those short, intense three months of toiling about, these two gentlemen ensured I had comprehensive notes for the five subjects I would be sitting for in the Qualifying Test. They patiently guided me through each topic, answered the questions I rose, and on top of that, motivated me to keep going relentlessly. Their unwavering support on

my journey built a strong educational foundation, one that I would carry with me throughout my life.

But in all honesty, it wasn't all just about imparting knowledge; it was about nurturing my spirit. Their encouragement, reassurance and the firm belief that I could succeed in what I had set my mind to were instrumental in boosting my confidence. The two made sure I entered the examination room not only armed with knowledge but also with a sense of self-assurance.

Reflecting on this chapter in my life now, I'm reminded of the scripture from the Book of Isaiah, chapter 41, verse 10 which states: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand". These words summarize the essence of the support I received from Mr. Mawazo and Mr. Wenje. They were not just teachers to me; they were my guiding lights, my pillars of strength.

The result of their selfless dedication was evident when the Qualifying Test Examinations commenced. With their guidance and my solid determination paired together, I navigated the challenges of the examination and emerged victorious. I successfully passed the exams! And it only proved that their contribution to my education was immeasurable.

I carry the memory of their generosity and belief in me with me to this day. Their kindness serves as a reminder that, in the midst of life's hardships, there are always individuals who are willing to step forward to light the way and offer a helping hand. These extraordinary men were my heroes, and their impact on my life is imprinted on my heart forever.

As the demanding journey of education continued, sleep became a luxury, and socializing with people close to me became a rare occurrence. The Qualifying Test stood ahead, a formidable hurdle that set apart those who would successfully proceed from those who might falter. I had colleagues from our church and my co-workers from my workplace at Bugando who were also preparing for the same test.



Sadly, not everyone who started this journey alongside me made it past the Qualifying Test. Some got to Form 4 but found the road ahead too steep to go down along. Yet, in the midst of these challenging times, my children stood as my pillars of support and encouragement.

The memories of exhaustion after a long day at work, coupled with the anticipation of upcoming exams, remain etched in my mind to this day. In those moments, my daughter, in the spirit of dedication to help me push through, would step in to help. With my study notes in hand, she would sit close, reading the topics aloud as I lay down. Her commitment was a motivating force that pushed me forward.

There were days when the extended hours of study left my body completely drained, my chest and back aching. In those trying times, my daughter's selflessness shone brightly. Sensing my discomfort, she offered not only encouragement, but also tangible relief. "How can I help, Mama?" she would ask. "Can you point to where it hurts on my back so I can massage you effectively?" Her willingness to understand and provide comfort through something as basic as a back massage became a ritual. Her hands, guided by love, eased the tension from my fatigued muscles, offering solace and strength in equal measure.

My daughter's unfaltering support was proof to the strength that came with the bond of family that continuously fueled my journey to better myself in every way possible. Together, we faced the challenges, celebrated the victories and endured the sacrifices we had to make in between it all. The scripture from the Book of Proverbs 31:25 resonated with me in those moments, "She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future". In those quiet nights of study, I felt that strength and dignity, and in my daughter's comforting touch, I found laughter amid the tough times.

This chapter of my life was one marked with so much sacrifice, dedication and the love of family. As I pressed on, fueled by the love and support of my children, I knew that every step was owed to resilience, a proof to the belief that education could transform lives and break barriers.

## **Nights of Sacrifice, Mornings of Hope**

The completion of my Form Two exams, the Qualifying Test Examination (QT), was a significant milestone in my educational journey. The results were unveiled in February 2005, and the news brought forth a wave of jubilation and renewed determination. I had successfully passed, and with each passing day, my belief in the power of self-determination grew stronger.

With this achievement in hand, I made a firm decision. I was going to continue my education journey, no matter the challenges that lay ahead. I resolved to register once more as a private candidate, this time for the Form Four exams, scheduled for October, 2005. Like that of the Qualifying Test Examination, it was a path that required unwavering determination and steadfast belief in oneself.

Regardless of my dedication towards the journey, the obstacles that stood in my way were far from conquered. Financial constraints still stood in my way, and I had to figure out a way to set a balance between my job and my evening studies. The latter necessitated the involvement of dedicated teachers, whose expertise came at a cost. It was a predicament that required a solution.

At this point, my dear friend, Mawazo, had relocated to Arusha, and Mr. Wenje, my other supportive mentor, was preoccupied with work and political commitments, making it challenging to secure their assistance once again like I had before. Simply put, it felt like the walls were closing in.

But as they say, fate has a way of stepping in when least expected. One day, as I was conversing with a former colleague from my first job at Norconsult, I opened up about my decision to progress my education. I revealed that I had already passed the QT and that I had already registered myself for the Form Four exams. My colleague was overjoyed and inspired by my determination.

In a moment that would change the course of my life, my colleague - Dossa, made a generous offer. He extended his hand in support and pledged to sponsor my education by covering the fees for the teachers who would guide me through this educational endeavor. It was a selfless, yet profound act of kindness and a lifeline that breathed life into my dreams.

With this act of generosity, I was able to find a team of dedicated teachers who would help me navigate the journey to my Form Four exams. Their guidance and expertise would be invaluable on this journey of learning and self-discovery.

The scripture from the Book of Proverbs 3:5-6, remind us: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight". This verse encapsulates the essence of my journey at that point in time, for it was a journey guided by faith and trust in a higher power, God Almighty.

As I commenced on this new chapter, I knew that the road ahead was not going to be one without its difficulties. But I had learned that with determination, self-belief and the kindness of others, even the most formidable challenges could be overcome. This was a journey of hope, a testimony to a dedicated person's ability to rise above adversity and pursue one's dreams with unyielding resolve.

My journey to attain my Form Four education was far from easy, but it was a path I had chosen to walk through with the utmost determination. With my Form two exams successfully passed, I had set my mind on the Form Four exams scheduled for October, 2005.

My fellow students and I compensated the teachers who mentored us on a monthly basis, since they wholeheartedly dedicated their evenings to provide us with the knowledge and guidance we needed. Often, the lot of us preparing for exams or re-sitting them would gather for these evening classes, and together, we set off on a journey of learning and growth.

Picture this: My days were a rapid, since I commuted from Bugando, where I worked, to attend the evening classes. Time sped by so fast, and my schedule was nothing short of a tightrope walk. At 5:00 PM, my pursuit of knowledge would begin at Mbugani Primary School with the teacher from Thaquaafa Secondary School, Mr. Juma. The next session followed at 6:00 PM at Mwanza Secondary School, and the evening would conclude with a 7:00 PM session at Pamba Secondary School. Thankfully, these schools were close, about a mile or two away from each other, which made the commute from one school to another manageable.

After these evening classes, I would head back home with assignments in tow. Upon my return, I would take on the role of both a mother and a student, checking my children's homework and helping them with their studies. Only then could I sit down to tackle my own assignments. On some occasions, I found myself laboring at the table until the early hours of the morning, only then would I realize that the clock had crept to as late as 2:00 AM.

This was a period of sacrifice, of seeking to strive, and of the persistent pursuit of knowledge. It was a chapter of my life where every second counted, where the weight of responsibility rested on my shoulders, and where the pursuit of education was a beacon of hope that guided me forward in my quest to provide a better, brighter future for myself and my family.

As I persevered through those tough evenings and long nights, I knew for a fact that it wasn't all for nothing, that however challenging, I was taking a significant step towards my dreams. It was a journey that required steadfast determination, unwavering faith, and the resolve to face every obstacle head-on.

As I reflect on those days of striving for my education, I must extend my deepest gratitude to my dear friend, Dossa, for his invaluable sponsorship of my studies. His unwavering support, both financial and moral, served as a beacon of hope in my life. It reinforced my belief that with faith and determination, all things are possible, guided by the mighty hand of God. His presence in my life was a true blessing, and

I pray that God continues to bestow His abundant blessings upon him. His generosity knew no bounds, and I will forever be grateful to him for his selflessness.

I recall those monthly visits to his office, where I would collect the envelope containing the money I would use to pay my dedicated teachers. In those days, the convenience of mobile banking services like M-Pesa had not yet graced our lives, which made these visits a necessary part of my monthly routine. His support was offered freely, without any expectations in return or any strings attached to the favor. It was a gift from the heart, and it carried me closer to my dreams with each passing day.

With the means to pay my teachers secured, I embarked on my journey towards the Form Four exams with newfound determination. But even as the financial hurdles were overcome, there was still a missing piece in my educational puzzle. I needed someone who could offer me additional guidance during my study sessions, a tutor if you will, someone who could solve the complexities of the subjects I was struggling with in school.

My evening classes were filled with students who had not achieved the required grades to proceed to higher levels of education. Picture this: I was the eldest in the class, already burdened with the responsibilities of a family; two children, a job and a multitude of other obligations on top of all that. The other students, out of respect, referred to me as "sister", due to my seniority. Compared to me, they were well-versed in the subjects we were studying, as they were revising to retake the exams in hopes of qualifying for higher education, unlike me who would be taking the exams for the first time.

In comparison to the rest of the class, I often found myself struggling to grasp what we were being taught. It was surely a humbling experience, one that reminded me of the importance of patience and the significance of seeking help when it's needed.

The scripture from the Book of Proverbs 4:7, states that: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get

understanding". These words rang true in my heart during those days. I understood that knowledge was not the sole key to success; that understanding and wisdom were equally vital.

What made me stand out on my educational journey was my willingness to admit to when I didn't quite understand something. It was a trait that set me apart, a simple yet powerful quality which time and time again proved to be a game-changer in my pursuit of knowledge.

Even after the teacher had left the classroom, I would approach my classmates and humbly ask for their assistance in clarifying the topics or concepts that had confounded me. It was a principle that had guided me on my journey so far and forth.

I would invite my fellow students to my humble home, where we would gather about and brew a pot of coffee to share. These gatherings were not just social meetings; they were opportunities for us to engage in further group discussions about our studies. It was during these moments that I discovered a remarkable gift within one of my classmates.

His name was Eze, and he possessed an exceptional talent for teaching. Eze excelled in nearly every subject, and he took it upon himself to tutor me. It was as if he had a gift for simplifying complex concepts and making them comprehensible to someone like me who had been struggling to grasp said concepts. Eze became my mentor and my guide, offering his knowledge freely and with boundless patience.

He taught me the art of essay writing, demonstrating how to craft responses to questions with clarity and precision. He revealed to me the details of connecting ideas, citing examples and presenting arguments in a seamless manner. Eze's teachings were a revelation, and I was astounded by his expertise.

Considering the renowned complexity of Tanzanian examination questions – they were never simple and straightforward inquiries. Instead, they demanded a deep understanding and the ability to

interpret the nuances embedded within the questions themselves. For instance, a question might be phrased like this: "With concrete examples, show why the conflict between Africans and the Whites during the colonial period was inevitable". Being able to answer the questions required more than just knowledge on the subject; but rather the ability to analyze and truly understand the question and then afterwards provide a comprehensive response.

I would like to take this moment to express my profound gratitude to Eze for his unwavering support during this critical time in my education. His selfless dedication to my learning journey made a world of difference, and his impact was significantly felt throughout my life.

The scripture from the Book of Proverbs 16:16, imparts the wisdom that goes: "How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!" Eze's guidance and the knowledge he selflessly shared with me were worth their weight in gold, a treasure that shaped my educational path and opened doors to new horizons.

My journey was marked not only by individual determination, but also by the generosity and willingness of others to lend me a helping hand whenever I needed it most.

Our pursuit of knowledge involved a balance of different subjects, and we remained loyal to the teachers who had become our guiding lights. Each subject necessitated its own mentor, and it was a commitment we were more than willing to honor. As a result, our evenings became a plentitude of movement and change, since we continuously shifted from one location to another in pursuit of knowledge.

Our schedule was carefully crafted. We would convene at Pamba Secondary School at 5:00 PM, ready for our one-hour session. Our course of learning would then lead us to Mwanza Secondary School, where we would meet Mr. Mabula, our dedicated History teacher. There, we delved into the complexities of history, dedicating another hour to expanding our knowledge.

But our quest for knowledge did not end there. We would later board

a bus to reach a place called Ilonganzala, where we convened with our English teacher. The English class was a deep dive into the details of language, literature and expression. Our class would often stretch into the late hours of the evening, wrapping up around 8:30 PM.

The completion of our evening sessions was followed by our journey back home, one that was far from simple, for me at least. Personally, I lived quite a distance from town, and the convenience of private transportation was a luxury I couldn't afford. That being said, every evening, despite the lateness of the hour, I would set out on foot, taking the path from Pamba Road to Isamilo, where my home was located.

This was my daily routine, one that demanded resilience and utmost patience. The trek was long and without doubt challenging, especially when the sun had long since set. And while many in the city could rely on public transportation to ease their journeys, this was a privilege I did not have. There was no means of public transport that could take me directly to my doorstep.

It was during these solitary walks that I found relief and inspiration in the beautiful night sky. The stars above became my companions, their twinkling lights a reminder that, even in the darkness, there was beauty and guidance to be acknowledged. In those quiet moments of reflection, I was reminded of the words from the Book of Psalms 19:1, which state: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork". These words resonated with me as I walked back home, offering a sense of purpose and direction.

My journey was a testimony to the lengths one would go to in the pursuit of knowledge. It was a journey filled with sacrifices, determination and a deep love for learning. Each step I took on those nightly walks felt like getting one step closer to achieving my dreams, one lesson closer to the future I had envisioned for myself and my family.

This chapter of my life was a reminder that the pursuit of education knows no boundaries, and that true dedication can overcome any obstacle one may encounter. It was a journey that strengthened my



resolve and instilled in me the belief that knowledge is a treasure worth seeking, no matter the paths we must tread to.

One day, as I was on my way back home after my evening classes, I was unexpectedly caught in a confrontation with police officers. They were in the act of arresting people, and for some reason, against my will, and for no apparent reason, they dragged me along with those they were taking into custody.

I couldn't quite understand why they were set on dragging me along, and in that moment, I had no choice but to muster all the courage and determination within me to resist. I knew I had to stand my ground and demand an explanation for their actions. I refused to comply with their orders unless they provided me with a clear and justifiable reason for wanting to detain me with the rest of the bunch.

The encounter with the police officers was a test to my resolve, a moment where I had to assert my rights and demand to be treated fairly. It was a reminder that the path to life was not one without its obstacles, and that even on the pursuit of knowledge, there were more battles to be fought than I had ever seen coming.

After so much controversy, they eventually let me go on my way, their initial intentions towards me still unclear, but their grip on me released nonetheless. As I resumed my walk back home, my heart was still racing from the unfortunate encounter, and I couldn't help but reflect on the unpredictability of life's challenges.

Finally arriving home safe and sound was a relief, but my responsibilities for the day didn't end with me turning my back and closing my front door. My role as a mother remained to be a constant. I immediately shifted my focus from everything else towards my children, ensuring that they had completed their homework, carefully checking their school uniforms to make sure they were well-ironed and ready to be put on the following day, and attentively listening to any stories they wanted to share with me about their day.

During bedtime, my son had his own set of expectations. He insisted

on a bedtime story or some reading time with me, a cherished norm that brought joy to his young heart. There were nights when he would even reject a particular book, asserting with all the seriousness of a child, "No, not that one, you read it to me last night". It was an indication of his boundless curiosity and his love for the stories that teleported his young mind to different worlds.

For me, those nights were a blend of exhaustion and fulfillment. I longed to speak up about just how tired I was after a long day of work and study, but I also knew that these were precious moments I couldn't afford to miss. The bond I shared with my children, the love we exchanged through stories and shared moments, was a source of strength and motivation that fueled my determination.

As I quietly reflected on the day's events, I couldn't help but draw inspiration from the Book of Isaiah 41:10, which reminded me: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, and I will uphold you with my righteous right hand". These words offered solace and reassurance in the face of life's uncertainties and challenges.

It was a day that had tested my determination and resilience, but it had also reinforced the unconditional love and steadfast commitment I had for my family. As I embraced these responsibilities, I found the strength to carry on, to pursue my dreams and to demonstrate to my children the power of unwavering determination and the value of a loving family.

As the silence of the night enveloped our humble home, and with the world setting into a slumber, I knew it was time to carry on to the next phase of my daily routine. My children were sound asleep, their dreams filled with hopes and dreams, their innocence a comforting glow in the darkness.

I sought out my house helper, a dedicated soul who played a vital role in our daily lives. Together, we would break down the tasks that awaited her the following day, and lay out plans for the meals she would have to prepare that would nourish my children. Their well-

being was always at the forefront of my mind, and I wanted to ensure that they had absolutely everything they needed to thrive.

With our plans set in place, I would steal a moment for a quick shower, allowing the water to wash away the fatigue of the day. Refreshed and renewed, I would return to the table, where the weight of my responsibilities took on a new form. It was here that I would tackle the assignments and lessons that my three dedicated teachers had left me.

The assignments were of a variety of subjects, each demanding equal amount of attention and dedication. As I delved into the particulars of English, History, Geography, Swahili and Civics, I couldn't help but feel the burden of the knowledge I sought to acquire. The midnight hours would tick away, and I would labor over my work, the lamplight casting long shadows across the table, an indication to the sacrifices I was making.

The night had a way of slipping into the early morning hours as I got lost in my books, and before I knew it, the clock would chime midnight. With every assignment completed, I would finally let myself get some sleep, my body and mind weary but determined still.

The new day would dawn with a soft morning light, and I would arise at 5:00 AM sharp, ready to take on the world once more. My children depended on me to get them ready for school, ensuring they were dressed and ready for the day ahead. Only then would my own preparations for work follow, and I would set off to take on yet another hectic day.

Throughout the course of my journey back then, life always had a way of testing my resolve, of demanding sacrifices. Juggling the demands of school and family was a challenging decision to say the least, and yet, it was a path I had chosen willingly. In addition to posing difficulties, my attempt at securing a better future for myself and my family was a peculiar path, one that left me reflecting on the expectations and doubts that others had cast upon me. It struck me as unusual that, as I pursued further education, it was mainly men who offered their support and encouragement, while many women uttered

words filled with skepticism.

Their concerns were rooted in the belief that my focus should have solely been on ensuring my children's education, for they saw my own desire and dedication for learning and furthering my own education as a distant dream. After all, nearly 14 years had passed since I last stepped into a classroom, and they relentlessly stressed on the challenges I would face in juggling responsibilities, the strain on our family's finances, and the constraints on my time.

Their words weighed heavily on me, but not once did they deter me. I was driven by a determination that refused to be influenced by doubt. I pressed forward regardless, studying late into the night, preparing for my Form Four exams with unwavering resolve.

In those moments, I was reminded of the scripture from the Book of Proverbs, 3:5-6, which had become a guiding light for me: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths".

I placed my trust in the path I had chosen, in the dreams that fueled my journey, and in the firm support of those who believed in me and what I was capable of. As I faced the challenges that lay ahead, I knew that I carried with me a determination that would guide me through the darkest of nights and into the dawn of a new day, into the course of a better future I had envisioned for myself and my kids all along. The one thing that kept me going. Regardless of all that sought to discourage me, I continued my pursuit for education, a beacon of hope for myself and children.

The road I had chosen was definitely demanding, a ruthless climb through seven months of tough study. It required my all, spanning topics from Form Three to Form Four, and delving into comprehensive revisions that stretched all the way back to the depths of Form One. Each day was a complex juggle of balance, a tightrope walk between the demands of my job, the nightly classes that awaited me, and last but definitely not least, the extra schoolwork I carried

home with me at the end of each day.

The burden I carried was indeed heavy, but I would do it all over again if I had to. As a mother, my responsibilities extended far beyond my personal ambitions. My children depended on me in more ways than one, not just for financial support, but for guidance, encouragement and unconditional love.

Every evening, I would return from my day's work, fatigued but nonetheless determined, knowing that the night consisted of revisions and exercises I had to see myself through that would eventually shape our future. The house would come alive with the sounds of my children, their homework and the shared moments that bound us together.

Supporting them with their studies was a non-negotiable commitment. I would sit with them, guiding them through their lessons, offering explanations and encouragement. It was a role I cherished dearly, for in those moments, I saw their potential and the bright future that awaited them.

There was one thing that remained constant throughout this demanding journey. It was an unshakable pillar of my life, like a piece of the puzzle which, no matter the circumstances, I refused to move – my firm commitment to never miss a church service. In the midst of my relentless schedule, I held tight to this sacred tradition, for it was a place that offered me comfort and peace of mind, a place where I could show gratitude to God for all that he had been doing for me and my family, and by doing so, it fastened me to my faith.

Church was where I found solace, where I could express my gratitude to God for the blessings of health and life. It was a sanctuary where I could let go of my worries and fears and seek strength for the path I had chosen. I knew that in this spiritual haven, my spirit would find the strength it needed to carry on.

As the days stretched into weeks and the weeks into months, my body adapted to the tough routine I had set for myself. Sleep became a

luxury, one that I could hardly afford. With just three hours of rest each night, I would rise as early as 5:00 AM every morning, determined to fulfill my duties as a mother and a provider.

Breakfasts had to be prepared, my children needed to be bathed and clothed, and school lunches needed to be packed. The kids' school had a canteen, but my limited resources made it more practical for me to send my children off with homemade meals, making sure it sustained them throughout the day.

My son had a unique morning ritual, a proof to his childhood innocence and the bond we shared. He was not one to be woken up by loud noises, instead, I would quietly enter his room, and with a soft and gentle voice, I would begin to sing a song. Only when the song came to an end did he wake from his slumber, gradually dawning into the new day. It was a small, but rather cherished routine, a reminder of the simple joys and revels of motherhood.

In the midst of this demanding journey, as I balanced the scales of my responsibilities, I found strength in my faith, the love I had for my children, and in the knowledge that every step I took was a step closer to the future we had dreamed of having.

In those moments, I was reminded of the scripture from the Book of Psalms 30:5, which states that: "For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning".

Each night, as I toiled and labored, I held onto the belief that the joy of a new dawn was well within reach. It was a belief that carried me through the darkest of nights and brought me closer to the dawn of a brighter day.

## **Navigating Form Six Exams and Beyond**

With the Form Four exam results in my hands, a surge of joy and gratitude welled up within me. It was a proof to the power of faith and

determination. I had performed well enough to proceed to the Form Six exams, another step closer to my dreams.

As I looked back on my journey, I couldn't help but marvel at the divine guidance that seemed to have walked with me every step of the way. It was not just my abilities that had got me so far, but a higher power that had coordinated the path of my life. Many of those who had supported me, who had shared their knowledge and engaged in discussions with me and the rest of the class, hadn't achieved the same level of success in their own exams as I had.

In enrolling as a private candidate for the Form Six exams, I embraced the challenges that I knew lay ahead, knowing that they would be difficult. This was a turning point in my education journey, a moment when subjects, especially English, took on a whole new level of complexity. It was as if the English I had known all along had evolved into something more intricate, divided into English One and English Two (literature).

During this phase, we delved into the nuances of language, learning the subtleties of pronunciation, phonology, morphology and much more. Even to this day, I admit to the fact that English pronunciations still remain a challenge for me. But this was a journey, and I was determined to see myself through it.

Our studies probed into the complexities of plays and novels, from classics like "Things Fall Apart", to thought-provoking works like "A Man of the People" and many more. Our discussions were lively, enriched by insights from the pages we read and the real-life examples they mirrored.

However, as the exams steered closer, I encountered questions that seemed to be harder than I had ever encountered before, questions like; "An educated individual is expected to be civilized and use his/her education for the benefit of the well-being of the entire society. However, sometimes such a person might not be necessarily civilized. Support this argument with reference to two plays you have studied using four points from each".

These questions were like mazes, complex and puzzling. At times, I felt lost in their depths, struggling to navigate the labyrinth of ideas and arguments they demanded. But I was determined, refusing to yield to the weight of the challenge.

In moments of doubt, I turned to the words of the Book of Proverbs 3:5-6, which had been my guiding light throughout this journey: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths".

I understood that I couldn't rely solely on my own understanding; I needed to trust in the higher power that had brought me this far, the Almighty God. With faith, determination, and the belief that I was never alone on this journey, I continued to press forward.

The path ahead was loaded with intricacies and obstacles, but it was also filled with the promise of growth and transformation. I had embarked on a journey of self-discovery, one that would test the limits of my abilities, the depth of my faith and the unwavering belief that with God's guidance, I could overcome even the most formidable challenges.

The journey through firm six is my personal testament to the resilience of the human spirit, evidence to the enduring power of dreams, and a testimony to the steady faith that all things are possible. It was a rather transformative phase of my life. This period introduced me to a diverse group of adult students, many of whom were teachers seeking to enhance their qualifications. We formed a close-knit community, united by our shared goal of educational advancement.

Our days were crammed, filled with the demands of full-time jobs, followed by evening classes. Beyond that, we had additional lessons with teachers to deepen our understanding of the subjects we were struggling with. Our schedules were packed, and our movements between subjects and schools we used as study venues were frequent. I often found myself walking back home by the end of the day due to



the unavailability of public transportation by the time we wrapped up for the day. It was for sure a tiring journey, but I never once hesitated to take the walk, confident that God was watching over me.

I acknowledged God's presence, and He indeed made my path straight, guiding me through moments that tested my resolve and courage. As I continued my journey into Form Six, I did so with the assurance that I was never alone, and that with faith, I could overcome even the most unexpected challenges that life presented.

My journey through Form Six continued to be a challenging yet transformative experience. During this time, I was fortunate enough to cross paths with my dear friend, Prisca, who was a primary school teacher, on her own quest for further studies. Prisca's background was deeply rooted in humility, influenced by her experience living with Catholic nuns. Her dedication to teaching and unwavering faith in me played a pivotal role in helping me comprehend many subjects that I found challenging.

With divine grace and some gentle persuasion, I managed to convince Prisca to move in with me, and together, we transformed our humble home into a hub of learning. It was our sanctuary of knowledge, where we could study side by side late into the night. Balancing work, family responsibilities and the demands of Form Six exams made my life incredibly busy, but Prisca's constant support and patience were invaluable during such trying times. There were times when exhaustion threatened to overwhelm me, and my focus waned, but Prisca, with her gentle determination, would read aloud and ask me questions to keep me on track. Prisca, holds a special place in my heart, and her support during that time will never be forgotten.

The Form Six exams were nothing short of a tough pursuit. I remember one particular day when we didn't get any sleep at all. We studied relentlessly throughout the day and night, only taking short breaks for quick showers before diving back into our study materials. When exhaustion threatened to pull us under, the mere thought of unfinished topics and the weight of our aspirations drove us back to our books.

We were basically in the midst of a race, a tough battle for our education and future. We pushed through the exhaustion, determined to complete our journeys and reach the finish line. The promise of a brighter future prompted us on, and we knew that with faith and perseverance, we could overcome the challenges that lay ahead.

In this chapter of my life, God blessed me with an exceptional Pastor, Pastor Geoffrey Lugwisha. He was not only a spiritual guide to me, but also a beacon of inspiration in our educational journey. Pastor Geoffrey urged church members to go above and beyond in their studies and was deeply invested in their progress. Even before we completed our Form Six exams, he would inquire about our university plans. As we went ahead and pursued our undergraduate degrees, he'd ask about our aspirations for master's programs.

Pastor Geoffrey himself was an embodiment of dedication. He pursued his second master's degree and a Ph.D. simultaneously at different universities, setting a powerful example for us. His unswerving commitment to personal growth was truly inspiring.

Throughout my life, influential pastors like Pastor Geoffrey have guided me. They did more than just share inspiring words; they demonstrated their faith through their actions. Their commitment to both their own personal growth and the well-being of their congregation played a pivotal role in fostering a positive environment that helped us reach for our dreams.

Our church was more than just a place of worship; it was a tight-knit community that extended its support to practical aspects of life. Gatherings at our church were joyous celebrations, filled with events that brought us together as a family. Whether it was Christmas, sports days or shared meals at the church, these experiences strengthened the bonds among us. Even today, when I go to Mwanza, I know that if ever I decide to visit during lunchtime, there would be a warm meal awaiting me.

Pastor Geoffrey went above and beyond in his efforts to support our educational pursuits. He organized free classes and provided teachers

for church members preparing for their Form Four and Qualifying Test exams. He strived to ensure that every church member succeeded in all aspects of their lives, he even went out of his way to celebrate our academic achievements with graduation parties.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt gratitude to you, Pastor Geoffrey, for your constant support, your enduring faith, and your dedication to helping us realize our potential. Your presence in my life was a true blessing, and your legacy of service and leadership continues to inspire me to this day. As the Bible reminds us in the Book of Proverbs 27:17, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another". You crafted us with your wisdom and guidance, and for that, I believe I speak for many when I say that we are eternally grateful.

As I moved through different places, I continued to be blessed with remarkable pastors who recognized the importance of knowledge and the pursuit of a higher education. Like Pastor Geoffrey, these spiritual leaders as well, not only encouraged their congregations to seek wisdom, but also demonstrated it through their own actions.

When I moved from Mwanza to Arusha, I found myself under the guidance of Pastor Lucky Yona. He was a devoted advocate for the pursuit of higher education as well, always urging church members to expand their knowledge. Pastor Yona was not all talk and no action; he led by example. At one point, he was pursuing two Ph.D. degrees simultaneously. In our church community, we were more than just attendees; we were a family. We celebrated together, especially during Christmas, where we shared meals and strengthened our bonds, just like we did when I used to attend Pastor Geoffrey's church in Mwanza.

Upon moving to Dar es Salaam, I was once again fortunate enough to have met a humble Pastor, Rev. Dr. Huruma Nkone, who conveyed the importance of higher education to our congregation. He, too, demonstrated his commitment to learning through his actions, he was finalizing his PhD when I started writing this book. Our church wasn't just a place of worship; it was a warm and welcoming family. We shared special days, engaged in sports and winded up with communal

meals. It was a place of fellowship, where we nourished our spirits and bodies together. I was lucky to serve as a Sunday school teacher, teaching the young members of the church under the leadership of the children's ministry director, madam Naomi Lukumai.

These pastors taught us that wisdom and faith could walk hand in hand. Their guidance and examples helped shape not only our spiritual lives but also our aspirations for knowledge. Through their guidance and persuasion for us as members of their churches to better ourselves, I was reminded of the Book of Proverbs 4:7, which states, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding". The pursuit of wisdom was central to our journeys, and these pastors were my guiding lights on that path.

I can still recall the day Pastor Geoffrey posed a question about something that seemed almost out of reach: "When will you start saving to buy a car?" He gestured towards the available parking spaces at our church. My reply, as a woman of faith, was simple: "Moving by faith is my way of life". The truth was, I was far from living the life I'd envisioned for myself. My monthly income was only just enough to meet my children's educational needs, provide for their basic necessities and cover the rent. The idea of saving for a car felt like an unforeseeable dream. Our mode of transportation to church were our own two feet, a daily 2-kilometer walk to and from, and totaling 4 kilometers. Taxis were a luxury beyond our means, costing around TZS. 2,000/- per trip, so we opted to use the money for church offerings instead of paying for a ride.

Pastor Geoffrey's words were both inspiring and perplexing. He urged us to explore global opportunities and become ambassadors for Christ. It was a grand vision, one that left me wondering how I could journey from Mwanza to another city, let alone another country. How could I, with my limited means, be an ambassador? It felt like a wild dream, too distant to grasp. Little did I know that the course of life would lead me to where I am today, residing outside my homeland.

Pastor Geoffrey had an unwavering faith in the impact of believers spreading across the world to preach the gospel. He believed that as

believers scattered, it became easier for the message of the gospel to reach those who had not yet heard it. He emphasized that even if only two people remained in the church, knowing that others were sharing the gospel worldwide, it was a worthy mission to win souls for Christ.

As I reflect on those days, I'm reminded of the Book of 2 Corinthians 5:20, which states, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us". Pastor Geoffrey's words resonated with this biblical calling, urging us to step beyond our comfort zones, and little did I know, that my journey would indeed lead me to become an ambassador for Christ, not just in mere words but in actions.

### **A Journey of Faith, Education and Perseverance**

Upon completing my Form Six exams, I faced the daunting reality of my results - a "C" in one subject, meaning I had not passed the rest of the subjects and that I needed to re-sit two other exams which I hadn't performed as well as I had hoped. It was a moment of reflection and a setback in my academic journey. It was during this critical time that I reconnected with a dear friend, Regina, a remarkable woman dedicated to her family and known for her admirable work ethics.

Regina had set off on a journey with an international organization and was inquisitive about my studies. In one of our heartfelt conversations, I bared my soul, sharing the twists and turns of my academic path. Her reaction was nothing short of astounding. She insisted that I choose a field of study, and she would sponsor it as a token of appreciation for our personal relationship and connections.

This offer was considerable and it filled my heart with gratitude. However, I knew that my decision needed to be weighed carefully. I had to put into thought not only my own dreams but also the well-being of my children. After a while of thoughtful contemplation, I made a choice that marked the beginning of a new chapter in my educational journey. I decided to pursue a diploma in Human Resources through online courses offered by Cambridge College. At

the same time, I embarked on the demanding task of preparing for the two subjects I needed to re-sit in my Form Six exams in order to improve my academic standing.

Regina's generous support covered my tuition fees and stood as a ray of hope during a time of uncertainty. With her constant encouragement and financial assistance, I set forth on a path to higher education, one that held the promise of a brighter future. It was during this phase that I toiled diligently to re-sit my exams, adding to the chapters of my ever-evolving story.

Regina, my dear friend, not only changed the course of my education, but also instilled in me a profound lesson about sharing God's blessings with society. While her offer to sponsor my diploma studies may have seemed like a small act of generosity to her, to me, it was nothing short of life-altering.

In a world where we're often consumed by our own needs and desires, Regina's selfless gesture served as a beacon of hope and evidence to the power of kindness. She reminded me that it's not always about the magnitude of what we can give but the willingness to share what we have, no matter how big or small.

I learned that in sharing, we create streams of compassion and goodness that flow far beyond ourselves. The world becomes a safer and more harmonious place when we extend a helping hand to those in need. It's often those who may not have an abundance but share what they can, who make a profound impact in the lives of others.

Regina's example and her belief in the value of helping others were a guiding light for me. They reinforced the idea that even in the face of challenges and limitations, we can make a difference and contribute to the betterment of the people around us, and better yet, the world. Her kindness and generosity ignited a fire within me, inspiring me to pay it forward, to share what I could with whoever might need it, just like she did for me, and to keep the cycle of goodwill going.

As I persisted on my educational journey, I carried Regina's profound

lesson with me, a reminder that it's not just about what we achieve for ourselves, but what we can do to uplift and support those around us that truly matters. In that spirit, I found strength, purpose and a profound connection with the teachings of the Bible, like those found in the Book of Galatians 6:2, which states "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ". I was determined to live out this verse in my own life, carrying the burdens of those in need and extending my hand to offer help and hope whenever I could. Regina's gift was more than just of fostering my education; it was a catalyst for the spirit of giving and compassion that would shape my journey from then onwards.

My pursuit of further education was not without its challenges. As a mother, I knew that any path I chose had to take into account my responsibilities to my children. It was important for me to figure out a way to balance my dreams and my role as a parent. Ergo, I began to explore my options, searching for a program that would align perfectly with my circumstances.

After careful consideration, I decided to enroll in The Open University of Tanzania, a renowned institution recognized for its flexible virtual learning programs and affordable tuition fees. This decision was driven by my passion for social work and my desire to give back to my community. I pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology program, eager to expand my knowledge and make something out of it.

Virtual Learning was a whole new world for me, one that required a level of discipline and time management that I had never known before. There were no fixed schedules, no in-person classes, and no teachers monitoring me to ensure I stayed on track. It was entirely up to me to set my study schedule, complete assignments and prepare for exams. The responsibility was both liberating and intimidating.

When I made my decision known to my friends and acquaintances, I was met with skepticism. They cautioned me that The Open University of Tanzania programs were renowned for dragging on for years, sometimes well beyond the typical three-year duration for a typical bachelor's degree. Their doubts for the Institution weighed heavily on

my mind, and I couldn't help but wonder if I was indeed embarking on a never-ending journey.

In spite of these doubts and discouragements, I made a choice. I decided to proceed, with determination and faith in mind, regardless of what everyone had been saying. I drafted my application, attached my certificates, and set off to send it to the university. However, before I placed it in the mailbox, I paused for a moment, and in faith, I said a prayer:

"Lord, despite the warnings of being stuck a 10-year journey, I submit this letter with faith that I will complete this degree in three years' time, in Jesus' name".

I did not know much about the power of that simple prayer. To my surprise and immense gratitude, it was a prayer that was answered in the most remarkable way. I embarked on my journey with unfaltering determination, and I can proudly say that, against all odds, I successfully completed my degree in exactly three years.

This experience served as a powerful reminder of the importance of faith, determination and the belief that with God, all things are possible. This journey was a proof to the guiding hand of the Lord, and it affirmed my belief that no dream is too big when it's carried on the wings of prayer and unwavering faith.

The beginning of my academic journey was a great challenge. I was like a ship lost at sea, grappling with piles of books, not knowing which ones to dive into and which ones to skim over. What made it even more challenging was the absence of fellow students in my city, or anywhere close by, who were taking the same course. I yearned for the companionship of classmates, the company of group discussions and the mutual support that comes with having shared goals. At that time, I felt like I was navigating these unknown waters all on my own, courtesy of the little support and involvement of my instructors.

But since life often has a way of catching us by surprise, my second year brought an unexpected ray of hope. I had the privilege of meeting



Mr. Ndekeja, a teacher who impacted my university experience in ways I couldn't have imagined. The Open University of Tanzania organized gatherings at their centers, and for students in Mwanza, those meetings took place at the PPF tower back in the days. This was a turning point for me, a chance to connect with my fellow students and bridge the gap that had once left me feeling isolated in my studies.

As we gathered, students, both freshman and continuing, were grouped based on our respective courses. These meetings not only facilitated interactions, but also allowed for collaboration and shared learning. At first, everyone was highly committed, eager to soak up knowledge and push the boundaries of our understanding.

However, as time passed, life's many demands began to weigh on some of my fellow students. Some had to prioritize other commitments and, with heavy hearts, discontinued their studies. Others, perhaps in pursuit of new opportunities or with the need to be closer to family, relocated to different cities. This gradual attrition lessened the number of students in our group, but it didn't affect our determination. In fact, it only reinforced our resolve to persevere.

I often reflect on the Book of Psalm 119:105, which states, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path". In this journey, the presence of Mr. Ndekeja and the support of my fellow students became the guiding light on my path. Their unwavering commitment, dedication and mutual love for learning illuminated the way forward, even as we encountered challenges. Together, we learned that the pursuit of knowledge is not a solitary endeavor but rather a collective one, where the bonds of unity and shared purpose could carry us through the darkest of times.

As the years went by and our group became progressively smaller, I came to appreciate the profound impact of true companionship in learning. In the realm of education, it's not just about what you read in books, but rather who you share your journey with that makes the difference. This is the beautiful way of life, crafted together by the strings of knowledge, determination and the supportive community of

fellow scholars.

Mr. Ndekeja, the extraordinary classmate who guided me in this academic journey, was more than just a fellow student. He embodied the spirit of selflessness and generosity that defines true companionship.

As I walked this path of learning, Mr. Ndekeja stood by my side, always there to motivate and inspire me. His dedication was unrelenting, and he showed me the true meaning of what it means to help others. Not content with just being a good classmate, he went above and beyond to assist me.

Mr. Ndekeja had an incredible talent. He reached a stage in his own learning where he could distill complex and lengthy books into concise summaries. This incredible gift he possessed saved me countless hours and spared me the daunting task of reading through voluminous texts. He took the role of a teacher, using his extraordinary skills to make my academic pursuit more manageable. Recognizing the countless demands from work and family I had to deal with, he extended a helping hand to ensure that our studies were completed within the intended three-year timeframe.

His words were like a soothing balm to my weary soul. It's almost like I can still hear him saying, "If I can teach my students at school and help them pass their exams, I will make sure you also succeed". His commitment was rock solid, his support unquestionable and his guidance unwavering. In him, I found not only a dedicated study partner but also a true friend of the family. Our relationship extended beyond the domains of academics. We shared stories, the highs and lows, the triumphs and tribulations of our personal lives and those of our families. Our bond deepened, and in Mr. Ndekeja, I discovered not just a colleague but a kindred spirit.

In those critical times of my second and third year of study, Mr. Ndekeja's influence and guidance played a pivotal role in achieving the good grades I had longed for. His selfless commitment to my success was a testament to the transformative power of genuine

friendship. As the scripture in the Book of Proverbs 27:17 reminds us, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another". Mr. Ndekeja's presence in my life positively influenced my resolve and propelled me to greater heights in my academic endeavor.

In that chapter of my life, he was the embodiment of the scripture that exhorts us to "love your neighbor as yourself". Through his actions and constant support, he demonstrated what it means to stand by a friend in times of need. Our journey together was not just about academic success but a proof to the profound impact that one person's kindness and compassion can have on another's life.

The days of exams at The Open University of Tanzania were a special time for students. We would gather in a spacious hall, the sense of anticipation and longing for success reverberating through the air. As we filed in, the diversity of our courses of choice was on full display. Each student was assigned a specific seat, a strategic arrangement that ensured students were seated in a particular order respective of the degrees they were pursuing. A sociology student would find an education student in front of them, a tourism management student behind, a mass communication student on their right and a literature student on their left. This arrangement was intended to minimize distractions and any sorts of inconveniences in order to enable us to focus solely on our exam papers.

As the days of the exams approached, I could feel the spark of my dreams becoming a reality. I had always admired those families who proudly adorned their walls with framed photographs of what their children had accomplished, especially the ones taken on graduation days. These photographs spoke volumes, capturing the proud smiles, the sense of accomplishment and the hope for a brighter future. It was a display of achievement that extended beyond just the individual person and embraced the entire family.

As I finally completed my studies and earned my degree, my own graduation pictures remained tucked away in an album, yet to find their place on the walls of my home. It was a dream deferred, but it did not affect the sense of fulfillment that came from knowing that I

had overcome countless challenges and persevered on this journey. It was a reminder that sometimes, the most meaningful and transformative achievements are not always visible to the world but resonate deeply within our hearts.

In those moments, I found comfort in the wisdom found in the Book of Ecclesiastes 3:1, which states, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven". My time to proudly display those graduation photos would come, but at the moment, I carried the joy of my accomplishment in my heart, knowing that the dreams I had worked so hard for were inching closer to becoming a tangible reality.

The graduation day had arrived, and it was a momentous occasion I wouldn't have missed for the world. The anticipation was intense as I imagined myself dressed in the iconic graduation gown, sitting patiently in the shade of the tent, and listening eagerly for the moment when my name would be called out by the Vice Chancellor. It was a prospect that filled my heart with delight.

As the ceremony commenced, I felt a blend of excitement, pride and gratitude all at once. The moment finally came when my name was called out, and I stood up to receive my hard-earned degree. Tears of joy welled up in my eyes, and a wave of emotion washed over me. In that instant, I couldn't help but reflect on the exceptional journey that had led me from the mere wish of obtaining a secondary school certificate to this grand moment of achievement.

Graduation day was a day of celebration and jubilation. It was a day to capture precious memories, share heartfelt congratulations with fellow graduates, and bask in the profound realization that I was now officially a university graduate. The weight of my degree in my hands was a tangible symbol of my hard work, resilience and unrelenting determination. It was an indication to the belief that, with faith and perseverance, dreams, however big, could become a reality.

The extent of my emotions on that day is difficult to put into words. It was a culmination of years of sacrifice, late nights of studying, overcoming doubts and pushing through challenges. It was a reminder

of the support and encouragement I had received from my family, friends and mentors along the way, and it was a reflection of the fulfillment that comes from setting a goal and striving to achieve it, no matter the obstacles faced.

In that moment, I couldn't help but think of the scripture from the Book of Philippians 4:13, which states, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". It was a verse that had guided me throughout my journey, reminding me that with faith and determination, I could overcome any obstacle. Graduation day was a testimony to the truth of those words and a celebration of the strength that comes from within when we believe we can achieve our dreams.

As I walked across the stage, my degree in hand, I knew that this was not just my achievement but a victory for all those who had believed in me, supported me and tagged along with me along my journey. It was a day to savor, to cherish and to remember that dreams, no matter how big, are always within reach if we dare to pursue them.

I had moved from Mwanza to Arusha, and the graduation ceremony was set to take place in Dar es Salaam. It was a significant event that I couldn't afford to miss. However, my journey to this moment was filled with twists and turns, and it seemed that setbacks were determined to test my resolve.

At that time, I was in Mombasa for an official conference, and the plan was to return to Dar es Salaam in time for the graduation rehearsal and eventually the ceremony which was scheduled for the following day. The itinerary was straightforward – a flight from Mombasa at 4 am, followed by a connecting flight in Nairobi at 7 am, which would take me straight to Dar es Salaam. Everything seemed perfectly set.

But since life is full of uncertainties, as I arrived at the check-in counter in Nairobi, I was met with disappointing news. The Kenya Airways flight to Dar es Salaam had been delayed. It was a sudden and unexpected setback, one that could easily have been disheartening.

That situation was a stark reminder of the interruptions, discouragements and challenges that can disrupt the plans we set out, be it our journeys to success or anything in the works. In that airport, I stood facing the uncertainty of whether I would make it in time for the graduation event that meant so much to me.

Even so, just as I had overcome countless hurdles on the path to attain my degree, I knew I couldn't let this unforeseen delay affect my journey. I refused to be deterred, and I held onto my determination to reach my destination, just as I had persevered through all my years of study.

With patience, resilience and steadfast faith, I navigated my way through the challenge presented, that being the flight delay. I managed to find an alternative way to reach Dar es Salaam in time for the graduation ceremony.

In the Book of James 1:12, it is written, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him". This passage resonated with me as I faced this unexpected challenge. I knew that, despite the delays and detours, I would reach the culmination of my journey.

That being the case, despite the hindrances I faced, I managed to make it to Dar es Salaam in time for my graduation. It was a moment of triumph, a reminder that no matter the setbacks we encounter, the determination to achieve our dreams can lead us to the most meaningful milestones in our lives.

The day of my graduation, November 26, 2011, was nothing short of extraordinary. It was a day filled with emotion, a sense of pride for my achievement and the realization of a dream I had held for so long. I stood there in my graduation gown, surrounded by my fellow graduates, each one wearing a different color gown representing their faculties. It was a sight to behold, and I couldn't help but look around in awe, as if to confirm that this was not just a dream but a beautiful reality.

This day was a milestone, a culmination of years of hard work, determination and unwavering faith. It was a proof to the power of declaration. I thought back to the promise I had made to God before embarking on my educational journey. I had expressed my desire to be "a living testimony for all women facing challenges in life, especially young single parents". And at that moment, standing there in my graduation gown, I had become what I had long wished for, that living testimony.

The journey to that moment had been far from easy. I had faced numerous obstacles, from the struggles of being a single parent to the financial hardships that threatened to interfere with my dreams. There were moments of doubt and exhaustion, times when the weight of my responsibilities felt overwhelming. But I had pressed on, guided by faith, determination and the constant support of those who believed in me.

On that memorable day in November, I realized the profound impact of my journey. I wasn't just celebrating my academic achievement; I was fulfilling a promise I had made to God and to myself. I was showing the world that with faith and perseverance, even the most challenging circumstances could be overcome.

Graduating from college was not just the end of a chapter; it was the beginning of a new one for me, where I could make a difference in the lives of others. It was a day that encouraged me to take on the role to inspire, uplift and empower others to overcome their challenges and reach for their dreams, just as I had. I knew that my story could serve as a beacon of hope, especially for young single parents and anyone else who thought that their circumstances were a barrier to success.

All in all, I couldn't think of anyone more worthy of my heartfelt gratitude than the One who had made it all possible – God. I recognized that without His grace and guidance, I would never have reached that point. As I stood there in my cap and gown, degree in hand, I knew that I was a living testimony to His mighty power and love when I choose to put my trust in Him.

The journey had been far from easy. It had required me to make sacrifices, giving up time that I could have easily spent with friends or indulging in leisure activities. To focus solely on ways that would lead me closer to achieving my educational goal, I had to set aside the pleasures of attending events and having time to myself. In every step of the way, I felt the comforting presence of Jesus Christ beside me. He was ever present, a guiding light in moments of doubt and exhaustion. The verse from the Book of Isaiah 41:10 reverberated in my mind in light of that revelation, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand".

In due time that long awaited moment arrived, the essence of the celebration, and the time for each one of us graduates to receive our hard-earned certificates that represented the culmination of years of dedication and hard work. The joy in my heart was overwhelming, and there was finally a genuine smile on my face I could not seem to contain.

I posed for pictures, standing tall and proud, knowing that that certificate was more than just a piece of paper. It was a symbol of the journey I had undertaken, the hurdles I had overcome and the dreams I had pursued with relentless determination.

My heart swelled with gratitude in light of all I had achieved, and as I looked out at the world that lay ahead, I knew that there was nothing I couldn't conquer with faith as my firm foundation.

I thought back to the time when I had first arrived in Mwanza, a young woman desperately seeking employment, without any formal qualifications to my name. Back then, the world of credentials was a foreign concept to me. The only work I believed I could do was basic labor – being a house-helper, a shop assistant, or an office cleaner – jobs that didn't require any formal qualifications.

But there I was, a proud graduate. If someone were to ask me about my qualifications then, I could finally, confidently say that I held a BA



in Sociology. It was a remarkable step, and it spoke to the power of determination and the pursuit of an education.

After the official ceremony and photograph sessions, my family and I embarked on a journey from Kibaha, where the graduation ceremony took place that year, to a different venue in Dar-es-Salaam for a small celebration with friends and family who resided in Dar es Salaam and some friends and family of fellow students with whom we contributed some money to cover the costs in order to make the celebration a success; friends and family who had traveled all the way from Mwanza to Dar-es-Salaam to share the joy of the day. We had estimated arriving at the venue by 3 or 4pm, so we could have plenty of time to enjoy the evening.

However, as fate would have it, our journey took an unexpected turn. We found ourselves stuck in the midst of a severe traffic jam, courtesy a road accident ahead. The hours ticked away, and the sun beat down on us relentlessly. It was the peak of November in Dar es Salaam, and the weather was stifling hot. We were all sweating profusely, and the delay took a toll on our energy and spirits.

I had been exhausted from the day's events, and the prospect of getting myself ready and putting on makeup felt like an insurmountable task. I had even considered wearing false eyelashes for the first time, just so I could look my best for the celebrations, but the weariness from spending all that time on the road had drained me. The traffic jam seemed never-ending, and it became clear that our carefully laid plans were on the brink of failing.

As time went by, as we were still stuck in traffic, I couldn't help but reflect on the journey that had brought me up to that point. The challenges and obstacles I had overcome to earn my degree were a testimony to the extent of my determination and faith. This unexpected delay felt like one final test on my patience. My relatives who resided in Dar es Salaam, the ones who were joining us for the celebration, had arrived at the venue early, and they patiently waited for our arrival. Their presence was a great source of comfort and joy during our celebration that evening.

The delay may have been frustrating, but it couldn't overshadow the significance that the day held. We eventually arrived where the celebration was taking place, albeit later than planned, and ultimately, the evening was filled with laughter, music and heartfelt congratulations from friends and family who had made it to the venue. In that moment, it struck me that, the true essence of achievement lies in the moments of celebration we share with our loved ones, and the bonds that unite us.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes 3:1, it is written, "To everything, there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven". That night, we may have encountered obstacles, but it was a time of celebration, a season of joy and a commemoration of a purpose fulfilled. It was a night I would forever cherish and remember, not for its hurdles, but for the love and support that surrounded me.

As I clutched the graduation ceremony book, I knew that it held a treasure trove of memories. It was a somewhat physical representation of my journey so far. From humble beginnings in the village with no more than a primary level of education, to the bold step of venturing into the city in search of employment, the gradual decision to seek further studies and everything else in between, to then, residing in the city with a recognized credential, was a dream that had become a reality. The words from the Book of Philippians 4:13 rang true in my heart, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me".

That was not the end of my journey; but rather the mark of a new beginning, a steppingstone to a future full of possibilities. Furthermore, as I looked out at the world before me, I was filled with hope, knowing that there was so much more I could achieve with the education I had earned.

My heart swelled with gratitude, and I dearly cherished that graduation book as a symbol of my determination and the unrelenting faith that had brought me to that moment. I was a living testimony to the belief that, no dream was too big, no obstacle too great, and that with God's guidance, all things are possible.

## Unexpected Twists, Resilience and the Gift of Generosity

Arusha, the city ever flowing with tourists, gestured with promises of a bright future when I first set foot there. Armed with a degree in Sociology, I decided to take a break from studies in 2012, savoring the victory of my accomplishments up to that point. However, 2013 saw me back in the academic arena, which is when I enrolled in a Post Graduate Diploma program in Project Management, with a schedule for evening classes.

An amusing twist awaited me: I had picked the course, settled its fees, and went as far as attending classes without even bothering to skim through the course outline. Realization struck me on the first day of classes when the lecturer enthusiastically delved into the topic of "Mathematics in Project Management". Panic crept in, and I scanned the room, observing the rest of the class, seemingly at ease with the mathematical details of said topic. Doubt gnawed at me—*"have I wandered into the wrong class?"*

Agitatedly, I scribbled a note to a fellow student, seeking reassurance, "Is this the class for Postgraduate in Project Management?" The reply, a nod and a warm smile, confirmed that I was indeed in the right class. The challenges posed by the mathematics throughout the course were nothing short of daunting. Regardless of, against all odds, I managed to score a "C" in the end, and the sense of accomplishment was nothing short of miraculous.

In those moments of mathematical turmoil, I found strength in a verse that resonated with me all through my journey, from the Book of Philippians 4:13: which states, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". The grace that carried me through each challenging equation mirrored the divine guidance that had marked my educational odyssey from its inception.

This unexpected deviation in Project Management became a metaphor for life's surprises—unpredictable, demanding, yet navigable with

determination and a sprinkle of divine intervention. The "C" on my grade sheet became a badge of resilience, a testament to overcoming the unexpected, and a reminder that every challenge, no matter how daunting, could be faced with faith and fortitude.

Victor, a colleague from when I worked at the East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community, showed me generosity which became a guiding light in my academic journey, he, as a dedicated tutor, led me through the complex web of numbers that had been troubling me.

My academic choices inadvertently steered me clear of the complexities of this numerical world. When confronted with the Qualifying Test, a pivotal step similar to that of the second year of high school exams, when I opted for what I perceived as manageable: English, Swahili, Geography, History and Civics. I did not anticipate much about the mandatory inclusion of Mathematics and Biology during my Ordinary level exams, expanding the subject count to an overwhelming seven. Despite registering for all seven, only five subjects saw completion.

Upon reaching the pinnacle of high school with form six exams, the academic landscape narrowed down to three essential subjects: English, Kiswahili and History. Mathematics, once an optional subject, now deemed as a massive challenge unavoidable.

Then came Victor, the hero to my mathematical troubles. An ICT Specialist in the organization I worked for back then. Victor not only harbored a fondness for the subject, but also, most importantly, he was willing to share with me the knowledge he had. Victor's selfless nature became apparent as he dedicated his free time to helping me deal with the complexities of algebra and navigating the challenges of mathematical problem-solving.

Under his patient guidance, the incomprehensible world of numbers began to unfold, revealing patterns and solutions that once seemed elusive. Victor's commitment was nothing short of the substance for my success, transforming mathematics from an imposing adversary

into a conquerable frontier. Alongside Victor, I found support in Gift, a dedicated classmate who took extra time to guide me through the basics of mathematics, ensuring that I had thorough understanding.

The day I proudly earned a "C" in Mathematics was more than just about academic achievement, but rather a celebration of collaboration, resilience and the profound impact of peoples' kindness and willingness to lend a helping hand.

## **Navigating the Uncharted Waters of Academia in Gender Studies**

Upon moving from Arusha to Dar es Salaam after securing a job with UNICEF, Tanzania, my life took an unexpected turn in two years' time. The decision to pursue a master's degree in Gender Studies through The Open University of Tanzania stirred a blend of excitement and apprehension within me. The confirmation letter arrived, announcing the program's commencement in a mere two weeks. Courtesy of the several responsibilities I juggled that took up most of my time and energy, I longed for a time off, a chance to slightly delay the inevitable.

In need of guidance, I sought a meeting with Prof. M. Kitula, the course coordinator. Pouring out my concerns and expressing my desire to postpone my studies until further notice, I hoped for a sympathetic response, a gesture acknowledging the overwhelming circumstances I was dealing with. However, contrary to what I had expected, Prof. Kitula responded differently—with a hearty laugh and a question that cut through the haze of uncertainty, "What makes you believe things will be a lot better next year? There is no assurance of a better tomorrow. Today is what you have, and today is the day to act. So, please, spare me the excuses. You are starting this program, and if challenges arise, we'll have to tackle them as we go".

Her words, though straightforward, carried profound wisdom. With her encouragement reverberating in my ears, I had no choice but to embark on the journey, regardless of my circumstances. The program's

format was unique—a blend of in-person lectures, followed by on-line sessions as well as culminating in in-person exams. As the program unraveled, a daunting task awaited at its peak: writing a research proposal and having to eventually delve into the actual research itself later along the line.

Our class, an array of diverse individuals, converged in the pursuit of knowledge. Adults from varied walks of life—teachers, social workers, health-care professionals, member of parliament, police officers, even community development officers—formed a unique cohort. Balancing the demands of work and studies, we embarked on a similar journey into the complexities of Gender Studies.

As the coursework finalized, a pivotal moment arrived, demanding individual contributions to the academic endeavor. The task at hand: crafting research proposals and delving into actual research. Each of us, armed with professional experiences and personal narratives, collaborated with internal supervisors who guided us through the intricate process. With our research documents in hand, we eagerly awaited the evaluation from external supervisors. Their discerning feedbacks held the power to green-light our progress or beckon us back for revisions and improvements. As I navigated through this phase, the words from the Book of Proverbs 3:5-6 resonated with me: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight”. This scripture became a source of solace during moments of uncertainty, it was a reminder that, even in the pursuit of knowledge, faith played an integral role.

The culmination of our academic journey rested on the shoulders of a single pivotal event: the defense of our individual researches. Each one of us assigned with a presentation date, we stood at the crossroads of validation and scrutiny. A panel of about five professors awaited, ready to delve into the details of our research findings. This was the moment of truth, a critical phase where we had to defend our work, owning every nuance of our research before the discerning eyes of academia.

The questions posed by the panel sought more than just answers; they sought a depth of understanding that transcended the surface of our researches. As we faced the panel, it felt like standing at the intersection of preparation and uncertainty. Graduation, that desired defining moment of achievement, hung in the balance, contingent upon the successful navigation of this intellectual terrain.

It's important to acknowledge that this journey was no synchronized march; the path to graduation meandered, with some completing the voyage sooner than others. The timeline of success varied, and the weight of uncertainty added an extra layer to our collective experience. Yet, through unwavering perseverance and faith, I, too, found my way through this formidable challenge, emerging on the other side victorious, with gratitude etched in my heart.

The wisdom from the Book of Proverbs 16:3 reverberated within me at that time: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans". In the face of uncertainty, I anchored myself in this verse, finding solace in the belief that, with commitment and faith, the path ahead would unravel as it was supposed to.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Childhood Life at our Village**

#### **My Simple Life at the Village**

As the sun painted the morning sky with hues of gold, our modest village home came alive with the hustle and bustle of Sunday preparations. The air carried the scent of anticipation, of a day set aside for something sacred, yet not entirely understood. My siblings—Jesse, Winnie, Michael and Godwin, too, were a part of this weekly ritual.

Our home, nestled within a banana and plantain plantation, held the stories of our days. Apart from the bananas and plantains cultivated at our home, the land also yielded crops such as coffee, mangoes and several others. Our Grandmother, a custodian of the property, was the one who tended to the farm, ensuring continuous harvest of the food crops such as cassavas and sweet potatoes the land bore. Her hands, weathered by the work she put into the farm over the years, always made sure we had food in abundance.



Our neighbor's avocado tree, a treasure hidden in plain sight, became an extension of our own reward. Our mother, hailing from Tanga, enlightened us on the benefits of consuming said fruit. In the simplicity of our village, the food we ingested was not just mere nourishment, it was a reward brought forth by the land

Sundays, however, carried a unique resonance. In the early mornings, before the world fully awakened, grandma would wake us from our slumber. When the sun was yet to reach its peak, she would call us to get ready for church. Our Sunday best was not a collection of fancy clothes, but the familiar feel of our school uniforms. In those outfits, we set off on a journey to the heart of our village—the Catholic Church.

Father Brandan, a white person amidst a bunch of black people, presided over our congregation. His pipe, a constant companion to him, added a touch of the mystery to the solemnity of the service. The school uniforms, worn with pride, transformed into our Sunday best—a symbol of reverence for a day set aside for more than just religious rituals.

In the innocence of childhood, the purpose of those Sunday gatherings remained elusive. Repenting sins and starting anew remained a mystery to us, yet, it carried a weight of sincerity with it, something we could barely grasp back then courtesy of our ages. The Catholic hymns, sung in unison, echoed in the sacred chambers of the church, and the aroma of incense lingered as a reminder of something holy transpiring.

As we stepped out into the Sunday sun after the service, our school uniforms, now infused with the spirit of collective worship, became more than just attire. They became symbols of a journey undertaken together—one where the abundance of our hearts surpassed the richness of any harvest, and where the weekly ritual of attending mass at church was a reminder that, in the simplicity of devotion, we found a sanctuary that surpassed the material world.

In the heart of our simple village life, our home stood as proof to both

the strength and fragility of family bonds. A modest house with two bedrooms, whose walls were built with mud-bricks, harbored not just the sounds of our laughter, but also the shadows of a father whose arrival transformed joy into a fleeting memory.

The kitchen, a separate space from the main house, became our refuge. Within those mud-stained walls, we forged a sanctuary of shared joys and whispered secrets. It was a space where the aroma of simmering pots carried not only the promise of meals, but also the essence of togetherness. Yet, it was in the confines of the kitchen where we found solace from the storms that raged beyond its threshold.

Our clay pots, weathered by the flames they were exposed to stand as silent witnesses to the stories that we exchanged. In one corner of the kitchen, the large clay pots held maize flour, while in another, they held drinking water. There were also clay pots that simmered with local porridge, “busara”, a tradition passed down through generations. Cooking pots, each with its purpose, lined the walls—a vessel for meat, another for vegetables, one for ugali, a staple and a slightly larger one for boiling sweet potatoes or preparing porridge.

In the comfort of these humble surroundings, the kitchen became more than just a place to satisfy our hunger. It morphed into a sacred space—a refuge from the harsh realities that sometimes crept their way into our lives. When our father, weighed down by the burdens only he knew, stumbled into the house under the influence of alcohol, it was the kitchen that became our hideaway.

After dinner, as the village plunged into darkness, the kitchen turned into a storytellers’ haven. My aunt, Mbusiro, a regular visitor who always had tales that were a mixture of reality and myths, became our guide as we delved into ancient narratives. Her stories, like flickering flames, cast shadows that danced on the walls, painting pictures of snakes with seven heads and ghosts that hungered for the souls of distant villages.

These tales, incorporated into our nights, stimulated a blend of fear and excitement. Walking from the kitchen back to the main house felt

a journey fraught with imaginary threats, the tales lingering in the air like the sound of whispers. Those stories weren't just mere narratives; they were strings connecting us to the essence of our culture and history.

In the kitchen, we often heard stories about family expectations and arranged marriages. These tales reminded us that our choices in life were often influenced by our elders' approval or disapproval. They served as gentle warnings about what could happen if we didn't follow the expected paths premeditated for us.

Gathered in the kitchen, we realized that our home, simple as it was, reflected the complexities of life. We faced our fears, shared our dreams, and tried to find a balance between following traditions and seeking personal freedom. The kitchen was where we tested and strengthened our family bonds. Through these shared stories, we found comfort and built the strong connections that would be of use to us in the future.

In our humble kitchen, one particular clay pot proved to be useful in the tales of our childhood adventures. This clay pot, with a crack to it, rendering it useless for its intended function, found new purpose as an unconventional toy, a vessel of joy and unforeseen challenges.

It stood proudly among its functional counterparts, an outcast, yet cherished. My siblings and I invented a game using the weathered pot. Taking turns, we would enter its gaping space, transforming it into a makeshift carnival ride. Like children reveling in the simple joys of a countryside fair, we rolled the pot. Laughter echoed within the confines of our kitchen, and in those moments, the crack in the pot seemed insignificant compared to the joy it brought.

One fateful day, Michael, always up to having fun, took his turn within the narrow bounds of the cracked clay pot. As his turn ended, an unexpected predicament unfolded. His head, trapped within the limits of the pot, defied all attempts at escape. Panic rippled through us, and a worried rush ensued to summon our parents.

Fortune favored us, as it was our father who arrived first. With a small stone, he gently nudged the pot close to Michael's head, creating enough space for him to emerge unscathed. The pot, once a vessel of amusement, met its demise in the hands of our father as he shattered it into pieces. Our unconventional toy was no more, but in its shattered fragments, we gained a story we would grow up telling in memory of our childhood antics.

When the pot broke into pieces, it taught us a lesson about how fragile our simple joys were, and how strong our family was. The kitchen, where we laughed and sometimes caused chaos, now held a story about our family's strong bonds.

In those village days, our playtime was simple. We made toys from clay and used our wild imaginations. Our brother, Jesse, always up to mischief, took advantage when our parents were away. With a playful glint in his eye, he played pranks that made us cry, then disappeared into the village. Despite the tears, we found strength and shared laughter, which became our treasures.

Thinking back, a verse from the Book of Proverbs 17:22 comes to mind: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." From the broken pot and our laughter, we learned how powerful joy and family bonds can be.

In the simplicity of our village life, our humble home stood as a haven, its proximity to the main road a backdrop to our childhood tales. Those were the days of uncomplicated pleasures, where the rare sighting of a car ignited a symphony of eager declarations, each of us laying claim, however quickly, to the passing vehicles.

The distant whirr of an approaching engine sparked lively banter over ownership— "That's my car!" we would declare, our voices merging in the chorus of childhood innocence. Unaware of our disputes, the vehicles continued on their journeys, leaving us laughing at the thoughtlessness of our claims. We had no idea that those lighthearted disputes would lay the foundation for the enduring bonds of sibling companionship.

Above us, the vast expanse of blue welcomed airplanes that painted white streaks across the sky. In those moments, we stood as a united front, heads tilted back, eyes tracing the trails, and hearts filled with curiosity. The distant travelers became the focus of our innocent aspirations.

"Send greetings to my uncle! Send greetings to my aunt!" we called out, our small hands reaching toward the heavens. The airplanes, oblivious to our simple requests, soared on, but in our hearts, a virtual connection bloomed—a bridge between our isolated village and the wider world. Through the transit of those high-flying messengers, our ties to family, no matter how distant, felt closer.

Life in the village was full of both joy and hardship. Our bare feet, touching the ground, showed signs of our adventures. The red soil told stories of strength and simplicity. When it rained, the land became a muddy playground where our laughter filled the air. These moments reminded us that even the simplest times were part of our shared life.

Life was full of both joy and hardship. The constant threat of jiggers biting our bare feet showed the challenges we faced. Our feet, marked by these experiences, told stories of exploration and vulnerability. Despite these difficulties, the red soil beneath us promised abundance and strength

Our celebrations were simple, highlighting the beauty of a modest life. Our family and nature were the treasures of our existence. Our bodies, covered in the colors of the earth, showed our shared experiences, with each step adding to the story of our journey.

These early experiences became lasting memories, shaping who we would become. As we left the village, the echoes of our shouts to passing airplanes reminded us that even though we were apart, our hearts remained connected by love.

In the simplicity of village life, we found the deep richness of a life built on love, family and the ground beneath our feet. These truths

remind us of the enduring power found in a life lived with open hearts and connected souls.

Reflecting on those days, to mind comes a verse from Colossians 3:14: which states that, "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." In our simple village life, love was the thread that united us, keeping our hearts together despite life's challenges.

## **Navigating the Storms of Fatherhood**

In the embrace of our village, where the red soil held tales of resilience, we navigated yet another phase, life with our father. He was a man of two worlds, a daily paradox that left us balancing on the fragile bridge between hope and uncertainty. Each morning, he seemed like the quiet, friendly figure we longed to get to know better.

As it dawned, he greeted us with a warmth that felt like a ray of hope penetrating through the clouds. His laughter, infectious, echoed through the corridors of our home, and his words carried the gentleness of a soothing breeze. It was in those moments that we saw a father we wished could be the light of our entire world—a peaceful sanctuary untouched by the shadows awaiting on the horizon.

But as the sun began its descent in the afternoon sky, a transformation unfolded. The peaceful world we had known in the morning became overshadowed by the looming storm of our father's unpredictable soul; one trapped by the traumatic influence of alcohol. It was as if the setting sun marked the beginning of a different reality—a reality where our father's temper, like a tempest, took force.

In the afternoon, caution became our companion. Innocent missteps, like walking on fragile glass, could trigger a sudden, unprovoked burst of anger. We navigated the shifting tides of his emotions, the calm morning replaced by the unpredictable chaos of the evening. And so, we learned to read the subtle signs in the air, the way one learns to predict a gathering storm.

Yet, even in the midst of this agitating existence, a glimmer of hope persisted— hope that the father we longed for would return in the morning once more, that laughter and warmth could prevail over the gathering clouds. It was a hope that held our hearts steady, even as the ground beneath our feet seemed to shake.

Our journey with our father was a mix of joy and challenges. We shared laughter in the mornings and faced storms in the evenings. In those tough times, we mustered resilience, gathering the strength to face and overcome the storms together as a family.

As evening drew near between 19:00 and 20:00 hours, the weight of the day rested heavy on our father's shoulders. His footsteps, like the depictions of his struggles, resonated through the air, a serious foreword to the storm that awaited us at home. The sounds, deep and loaded with an invisible burden, reached our ears, and we, like frightened birds, felt the chill of impending darkness.

In the heart of our home, the kitchen witnessed our family's unfolding drama. Its earthen walls absorbed the stories of our father's struggles. Inside, we, the unsuspecting children, awaited his return. Sometimes, we sat in uneasy silence, finishing our meals, knowing that the sound of his footsteps meant the start of another tantrum episode we wanted no part of.

It was there, in the kitchen, surrounded by the wooden bars of a mud-caked window, that we sensed the gathering storm. We were children, small and vulnerable, yet extremely hyperaware to the signals of unrest. As the unsettling sounds of our father grew louder, we'd scramble to escape, our movements fueled by a fear that wrapped around us like a suffocating cloth

With quick grace, we'd slip through that window, seeking refuge in the banana plantation—a secret haven we had carved out for ourselves. The leaves rustled as we sought sanctuary, our hearts pounding in rhythm with the drumbeat of uncertainty. Fear became our influence,

steering us into the darkness of our improvised safe space. The risk of the unknown, whether snakes or wild creatures, couldn't compare to the terror that awaited us at home.

As the night unfolded, and the shadows deepened around us, we clung to each other, our hearts intertwined with the threads of fear. In the darkness, we found an unlikely shield, a refuge from the storms that raged within the walls of our home. And so, we waited in the shadows, hoping for the dawn that would bring with it the promise of a gentler morning, where the sounds of laughter could drown out the haunting footsteps of the evening.

In the sanctuary of our creation, born from the innocence of our childhood, our safe space stood as a tender symbol—a refuge carved out from the shared terror of fleeing our own father. It wasn't merely a haven; it was a fortress meticulously crafted for a singular purpose—to escape the looming presence of our own parent. Small and scared, we clustered together, finding relief in the unspoken solidarity of siblings bound by a common trouble.

The darkness enveloped us, granting a semblance of safety, yet it was not impenetrable. Unseen risks waited in the shadows, but none could be equivalent to the immediate danger posed by our father. He was a specter, a haunting force that chased us ruthlessly. His anger defied reason, and the consequences of his anger were brutal. Terrifying hands would grip us around the waist, lifting us off the ground while his fingers pinched our bare skin, leaving both physical and emotional wounds in their wake.

I remember a particular day from my childhood, when our father came home earlier than usual. The sun was still high, casting a warm golden light over our village. We, the siblings, were playing games and laughing. Our father's unannounced arrival brought an unexpected storm. His voice demanded answers about some misstep or misplaced item. We froze, holding our breath, as the seriousness of the moment settled upon us.

My sister, Winnie, in an unfortunate twist of fate, was the cause of the



chaos. The reason behind the mess rested fully on her small shoulders. As our father sought the truth, panic seized her. In that moment, in fear of what would happen to her if the truth were to be revealed, she pointed her trembling finger at me. Time seemed to slow down as her accusing words hung in the air, and all eyes turned towards me.

Caught off guard, I looked at Winnie, expecting her to retract her accusation, to admit the truth. But fear gripped her like a vice. Her eyes betrayed her, and in that instance, a small, involuntary tremble shook her frame. It was the ultimate confession of guilt, and I noticed something heartbreaking – the silent release of urine, a manifestation of the terror she felt inside.

I had a choice. I could protest, declare my innocence, and expose Winnie in her misdeed. But as I looked at her, small and vulnerable, the words of defense died on my lips. The weight of my sister's fear was intense, and I chose to bear the punishment on her behalf.

Our father, unaware of the real offender, delivered his judgement. The punishment was swift, a consequence of a crime I did not commit. Later, when our mother returned, I dutifully reported the incident. However, there was little she could do other than offer a motherly warning, reminding Winnie of the importance of telling the truth.

In the aftermath, as the shadows of the day lengthened, I couldn't shake the image of Winnie trembling and the silent evidence of fear staining her innocence. It left an indelible mark on my heart, an instinctive understanding of the lengths we go to shield those we love from the harshness of the world.

In that trial of childhood, I glimpsed the complexities of familial bonds – the sacrifices, the unspoken agreements and the silent assurances that no matter the storms, we'd weather them together. And as the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows over our village, I carried with me the burden of a sibling's fear, a burden borne out of love and a desire to protect.

In those dreadful moments, our safe house, conceived in the pureness

of our childhood, witnessed the visceral reality of a family haunted by its own shadows.

Within the confines of our temporary refuge, we endured the pain—both physical and emotional—inflicted by a problematic man. Each lift of our small bodies, each pinch of our skin, was a grim reminder of the fragility of our sanctuary and the delicate balance we maintained in the face of our father's unpredictable storm. And so, in the darkness, we waited, yearning for a dawn that would not only bring the light of day but also the promise of gentler hands and a healing touch to mend the wounds inflicted upon our shared innocence.

In the midst of the storm, that was our father's unpredictable fury, our mother emerged as a quiet yet unyielding soul. She, too, was not spared from the tempest that raged within our home. When he crossed paths with her, he treated her as a stranger, an unwelcome visitor in her own home. With heavy steps, he would enter the kitchen, where five children clustered together in fear, their innocent chatter filling the room. But when his presence loomed, we would scatter through the kitchen window, like alarmed birds taking flight from an approaching storm.

Our hearts pounded with fear as we sought refuge in the welcoming shadows of our safe space. He could hear the worried rush of our feet seeking escape, or so I believe, yet as he did open the door to the kitchen, he walked into an empty room, a void of our presence. The shades of our retreat, like a mysterious ghost, slipped through his grasp. He searched, calling out for any sign of life, but all that answered was the eerie silence of our absence.

With the passing of time, he would move on to the rest of the house, where our mother had dutifully prepared his meal. He would eat, the raging fury within him momentarily appeased, and then he would surrender to the weariness of the day. It was during those moments of silence that we, tucked away in the refuge of the shadows, would sense the signal to emerge from our hiding places.

In the dark embrace of the banana plantation, we would gather, waiting

for the peace that accompanied his slumber. In the midst of that darkness, our hiding spot seemed safer than the unpredictable grip of our own father. It was a cruel and unconventional existence, one we recognized as far from normal, but it was the only way we knew how to survive.

Our mother, in her quiet courage, remained a steadfast presence amidst the chaos, guiding us through the turbulent landscape of our lives. As we waited in the shadows, our shared innocence intact, we yearned for the dawn that would not only bring the light of day, but also the promise of a gentler world, one where the storms would retreat and our family would find its way back to the path of peace and love.

My mother was not spared from the relentless storm that swept through our home when our father arrived, drunk and unpredictable. She, too, sought refuge, but her hiding place was not far, it was just behind the kitchen door, slender enough to fit in the narrow space, she hid herself.

In those moments, it became painfully clear that my mother, too, was a victim, a casualty of our father's irrational wrath. No one, not even her, was exempted from his unpredictable anger. The punishment he inflicted upon us seemed to bear no connection to neither reason nor justice. She would hide behind the door, a silent observer of the unraveling chaos, vigilant for the moment our father's turbulent spirit would yield to slumber, and only then would we emerge from our hiding place situated within the banana plantation.

There were times when he would return home, fueled by alcohol and fury, holding sticks which he would use to inflict pain upon us. He carried them without rhyme or reason, and my mother, weak and defenseless, bore the burden of his irrational rage.

As we grew older, we mustered the courage to question our mother about why our father behaved as he did. In her quiet but steady honesty, she revealed the painful truth—our father was an alcoholic, a prisoner of addiction, and the marijuana he would consume, as it turns out, only worsened the situation. The toxic combination of these

substances plunged him into a darkness from which his violent eruptions emerged. It was a revelation that broke our hearts but helped us understand the torment that gripped him.

In the midst of this tumult, our mom, on our behalf, held to the wisdom found in the Bible: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). It was a verse that whispered a sense of comfort in our darkest hours, reminding us that even amidst the chaos, there was a higher presence that could offer solace.

In the shadows, my mother's silent strength became a guiding light, showing us the path through the difficult times. We waited for the dawn, silently praying that the storm that raged within our home would eventually subside, that our father would find the strength to overcome his demons.

Childhood is full of stories—some you hold close, others you'd rather leave behind. One of those moments for me was when our mom had to leave us to visit her family. I was young, but I remember how things changed while she was away. My younger brother Godwin, still a baby, was sent to stay with Grandma in Tarime town, where she was caring for our ailing grandpa, who was struggling with diabetes. That left the rest of us at home with Dad and an older cousin who came to help out.

It wasn't until years later that Mom finally told us the full story. She hadn't seen her family in so long that her father—our grandpa—finally took matters into his own hands. This wasn't a gentle request; instead, he sent a letter to my dad with a demand: he wanted his daughter back. Her absence had gone on too long, and he wasn't going to let more time slip away.

Dad had no choice but to let her go, but he insisted on one harsh condition—she had to go alone, without taking any of us children. Imagine being a mother of five, yearning to reconnect with family who hadn't even met your children, and yet being forced to leave them behind.

We didn't have much at that time. Life was simple, and we didn't have phones or social media to share glimpses of life with distant relatives. So, with nothing but a single dress and a worn paper bag for her belongings, Mom set off to Dar es Salaam, where her father was at that time staying with his daughter – my mom's sister. When she finally arrived, the sight of her struck her relatives like a blow. Mom later recounted how their hearts shattered the moment they saw her, their emotions erupting in tears so raw it felt like a funeral had descended upon them. She stood there, frail and weary, clutching nothing but a crumpled paper bag. Her silence carried a weight heavier than words, and though pain flickered in her eyes, she held it tightly within as they gathered her into their arms. Someone whispered the question that had hung unspoken in the air, "Where are your bags? Your suitcases?" The absence of luggage spoke volumes, an unthinkable emptiness for someone who had traveled all the way from Tarime. She had nothing. Nothing but the paper bag, her resilience, and a story that no one was ready to hear.

When she returned, she brought back clothes her relatives had lovingly given her. That visit, though difficult, brought her some comfort and brought her family some closure, even if just for a little while. And while it took her away from us, it also showed me just how deep a mother's love and resilience could go.

My elder brother Jesse remembers being worried that while Mom was away, we wouldn't survive under Dad's care. But to our surprise, Dad was different during that time. He took the effort to make sure we were well cared for—cooking for us, making sure we ate, that we were showered, and that everything was in order. He was so friendly and caring, to the extent that we wished life could stay like that, with this positive, nurturing side of Dad. It was the best time we'd ever had with him around; we felt a level of love and care we hadn't imagined possible. For the first time, we got to see his best side as a parent.

Now, as I think about it, I wonder why he treated us so kindly only when she was gone. When Mom returned, it felt like he became his old self again, with the anger and harshness that always seemed to

hang in the air.

Looking back, those moments showed me a complex side of family life—the tenderness hidden beneath the tension, the love mixed with hardship. They’ve shaped who I am today, teaching me about resilience, love, and the strength it takes to endure.

Over the course of time, an unfortunate thing happened. Our father, as a result of struggling with his addiction for a while, passed away. He departed from this world while my siblings and I were still very young, none of us having reached the age of ten. His passing left us to navigate the uncertain journey of life all alone, a path that would have to be lit by the unwavering strength of the only parent we had left, our mother, a remarkable woman who stood as our guiding light.

At a tender age, she was subjected to widowhood, carrying the weight of raising five children on her shoulders. The memories we had of our father were a complex mosaic, destroyed by the shadows of fear and anxiety. Yet, even within those dark chapters of our lives, there existed faint glimmers of light, like the flickering embers of a nearly extinguished fire.

My brother, Jesse, to this day, still recalls those fleeting moments when our father, however inconsistent, would gather us together to sing Christian hymns in the morning. In the midst of those songs, we found relief, although just for a brief moment, a respite from the storms that had characterized our childhood. The verses to the songs conveyed messages filled with hope, redemption and forgiveness—qualities we clung to as we embarked on our own journeys, driven by a burning determination to break free from the shadows of our past.

It was in the music that we discovered a sense of unity, a shared purpose that transcended the barriers of our chaotic upbringing. The hymns, like sacred tunes, carried us through the darkest nights, a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. Their melodies resonated with a message that whispered of renewal, the promise of a fresh beginning—a promise we carried solemnly with us into the world, determined to rise above the challenges that had defined our

early years.

In the verses of those hymns, we found strength to face the trials of life, to embrace hope and forgiveness, and to paint our own narrative of life, one free from the shadows of our past. It was a legacy of resilience, an inheritance of strength that our mother, with her unyielding spirit, had passed on to us.

Following our father's passing, a new chapter of our lives began to unfold. Our relatives, filled with love and compassion, stepped in to support us, especially the three of us who were older. They recognized the burden our mother carried and extended a helping hand, becoming a vital part of our family's support system.

These kind-hearted relatives stood with us, offering their guidance, love and care throughout our formative years. They remained steadfast by our side, a reassuring presence as we navigated the twists and turns of growing up. I was fortunate enough to move in with my cousin Mzee Roman, who was nearly the same age as my father would have been if he had still been with us. Alongside his wife, shepherding us like a mother, they provided the warmth and stability we needed during a time of such profound loss.

In those years, they proved to be more than family to us; they were the embodiment of love and support. I will forever be grateful to them for the unwavering love they showered upon my siblings and I, for their presence was a beacon of hope amidst the uncertainties of our world.

As I look back, I am reminded of the simple yet profound truth captured in the Bible: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Our relatives demonstrated the profound impact of love in our lives, providing us with faith and hope to carry us through those challenging years.

Their kindness and generosity were like a strong bridge, connecting our fateful past with our future. They brought stability and warmth into our lives, helping us move forward. Their love truly guided and

supported us through life's challenges

## **Life with Grandma**

It was a humble village where we lived, a place where time moved slowly, and the rhythm of life was dictated by the rising and setting of the sun. In the heart of this peaceful setting lived my grandparents, a couple whose love story unfolded in the corners and crannies of a small village in Tanzania during the colonial days.

Grandpa, Mzee Mumuncha, a man fond of innovation and progress, had ventured beyond the norms of his time. He was among the first few people who brought change to the dusty streets of Tarime city, opening the doors to a butchery where others merely traded meat under the shade of ancient trees. His culinary skills had even caught the attention of the German community, henceforth earning him a position as a cook among them. Even so, his heart remained tied to the ways of the village, where the roots of his love story with grandma had been firmly established.

And then there was grandma, a woman of strength and tradition, whose roots were entwined with the land of that very village. She held fast to the ways of her ancestors, embracing a life where the kitchen was her sacred domain. For her, it was a space where the transformation of love and sustenance happened, and no man, not even her beloved Mzee Mumuncha, could intrude upon it.

Their love story, narrated to us by the flickering firelight, painted a vivid picture of the clash between modernity and tradition, a tale that unfolded within the walls of their home. Grandma, with her weathered hands and a heart that beat to the rhythm of the village ways of life, refused to surrender to the foreign influence of the city.

In our childhood innocence, we laughed at the idea of grandpa wanting to be in the kitchen all the time. Grandma's eyes sparkled with both frustration and affection as she recounted those days. "Your grandpa," she would say, "wanted to be a kitchen magician. But I told him, 'Men



don't belong in the kitchen.' I cherished that space, and he was trying to steal it from me."

As we listened to her stories, we could feel the unspoken tension between tradition and modernity, love and frustration. Grandpa, having learned the art of cooking from the Germans, was eager to share his newfound skills with grandma. To him, it was an expression of love, an attempt to bridge the gap between their worlds.

But grandma, with her resolute spirit, saw things differently. She viewed it as an intrusion, a disruption of the balance she had carefully maintained in her kitchen. In those moments, love became a balancing act, a careful adjustment where two souls tried to find harmony amid the clatter of pots and pans.

Looking back, I realize that their love story was not just about kitchens and cooking. It was a testament to how love helps people endure challenges and adapt to changes. It was a story of compromises made and traditions upheld, an act that continued through the generations.

In that small Tanzanian village, amidst the whispers of the wind and the rustle of the trees, my grandparents taught us that love, in all its complexities, is what connects and shapes our lives. As we gathered around the fire, the warmth of their stories enveloped us like a comforting embrace, reminding us that sometimes, it's the simplest moments hold the deepest emotions.

Years passed, and the story of our grandparents' love continued to influence us, creating a blend of joy and sorrow. The conflict between grandma's steadfast traditional values and grandpa's ongoing drive for progress left a lasting impact on our family.

The gap between their worlds widened until grandma, with a heart filled with determination, decided to return to the village, leaving grandpa alone in the bustling town. Their separation, fueled by nothing but stubborn pride, became a silence that hung in the air, unspoken words lingering like ghosts of what once was.

Grandpa, not one to easily accept defeat, attempted to bridge the gap. He pleaded with grandma to come back, to rebuild the home they had created together. But her resolve was steadfast. She stood firm in her decision to reclaim the simplicity of village life.

In a desperate attempt to reason with her, grandpa made a drastic choice. He too journeyed to the village, where the houses he had built with tears and sweat stood tall. With a heavy heart, he demolished them one by one, the resound of each falling brick resonating with the crumbling of their shared dreams. The herd of cattle and goats, a symbol of prosperity, was led away, leaving behind an emptiness that was felt in the silence of the fields.

Grandma, undeterred, watched as the structures of their shared past turned to remains. She had chosen simplicity over wealth, tradition over modernity. The grand houses that were once filled with laughter and love were reduced to mere memories. From that day forward, our home was stripped of the greatness it once held. The only companions she had left were the chickens, ducks and loyal dogs.

Grandma, resolute in her decision, built a small muddy house in the village, a sanctuary where tradition held control. The fields that surrounded her newly built house were filled with the essence of her resilience, a single woman standing against the tides of change.

It wasn't until grandpa's health faltered, his eyes dimmed as a side effect of diabetes, that grandma's children, my uncles and aunts, pleaded with her to return to him in the city. The once stubborn woman softened, her love for my grandpa transcending the tension between them. She went back to care for the man she had once refused to be with.

Over the course of time life took its toll. Grandpa, having endured the challenges of separation, passed away, leaving behind the memories of a love story written in the language of compromise and sacrifice. Grandma, having stood her ground for so long, returned to the village once more.

Grandma, a storyteller in her own right, had given birth to girls first, a legacy that intertwined with the generations that followed. In her desire for boys, she became a mother and grandmother simultaneously, some of her children and grandchildren being of the same or close in age. The complexities of family, love and time resolved in the stories passed down through the years, a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of life's inevitable changes.

In the heart of our village, grandma stood as a beacon of strength and beauty. Her light skin glowed under the sun, and her smile, a reflection of the stories being told by the wrinkles on her face, welcomed all who would cross our household.

Her big, rounded legs were admired by many for their beauty and strength. To us, she was the epitome of beauty, with legs that drew admiration and showcased her timeless grace.

Grandma, who had her own way of enjoying her leisure time, had a liking for her smoking pipe. Despite her age, she would share tales of a time when the world was way different, when she embraced the art of smoking long before the responsibilities of marriage rested on her shoulders. Her pipe, a constant companion, held the stories of a woman unapologetically herself.

Tobacco, to grandma, was a form of art. She knew it and could differentiate it by textures, as well as the flavors that burst on the tongue. With a discerning eye, she would declare, "This is a good one," or dismiss another with a shake of her head. In the backyard, she grew her own tobacco, on a quest to ensure that the taste of her pipe was always of the highest quality.

Her love for meat, especially the tender hump of a cow, was unmatched. Even when the leftovers from the previous day's meal were still there, if she had a bit of money, she would go to the market and return with more. There were times when there was an abundance of meat in our kitchen, meat preserved in various the traditional way—salted, tied with ropes, and suspended from the thatched roof, facing

down towards the warmth of the traditional fireplaces. The preserved meat would sustain us for months at a time.

However, life in our village was not solitary. Our home, strategically situated close to the main road, became a hub of activity. The village center, with its shops, milling machines, markets, butcheries, church and local brew huts brought a constant stream of people to our door. Grandma, ever the gracious hostess, would welcome them with open arms, a pot of stew simmering on the fire for them.

Lunchtime was like a celebration of community. Even during the simplest of meals, grandma would say, "Add extra portions; you never know who might join us". And as a matter of fact, people did join us—neighbors, friends, passersby—all drawn to the warmth of grandma's hospitality.

In our day-to-day life, my mother, a partner in both the kitchen and life, shared the cooking duties with grandma. The aroma of their cooking filled our home, a burst of flavors that mirrored the harmony of their relationship. Some days, it was mom at the helm; other days, grandma, with her weathered hands and a heart full of stories, taking charge.

In that bustling kitchen, amid the laughter and the clatter of pots, grandma's legacy unfolded. Her beauty, not just in appearance but in the generosity of her spirit, became a guiding light for us all. And as we gathered around the table, we savored not just the flavors of the food, but with it the richness of a life well-lived, a love that transcended generations.

In the heart of our busy kitchen, grandma's cooking skills displayed in ways both unconventional and engaging. Her hands, weathered over time, made their way through the kitchen, creating flavors that stuck in our memories long after the meal had ended.

When grandma decided to treat us to the rare delight of chapati, her method was all her own. She heated a pan filled with cooking oil, just as if she were about to make mandazi. But instead, it was the rolled

chapati that would soon sizzle in that pan. Half-submerged, it emerged from the pan not soft and pliable as tradition dictated, but delightfully crunchy. As kids, unfamiliar to the luxury that is chapati, we enjoyed the crispy treat, cherishing the love put into every perfectly imperfect bite.

When it came to chopping vegetables, grandma discarded the formality of using a knife. Her hands, a symbol of a lifetime's expertise moved with grace that only experience could grant. The crunchy sound of vegetable leaves meeting her palms showed the simplicity of past ways of getting things done and how resourceful she was out of necessity.

Her kindness, a constant character revealed itself in simple gestures. Whenever she had enough money, she would buy sugar and bring it home, which we would use in our tea and whenever necessary.

"Eat when food is available" she would say, words she would reiterate time and time again over the years. The wisdom instilled in those words was a guiding principle in the ebb and flow of life. In times when there was plenty of food, we would feast on the richness of her creations. And when we experienced scarcity, we learned to live by what was available.

In grandma's kitchen, every meal became a lesson in gratitude, recognizing the routines of our daily life. She taught us that seasons weren't only dictated by the changing weather, but also by the availability of the things we often took for granted. The availability of good food, like a fleeting season, was to be cherished, and that sustenance was a gift worthy of being cherished as well.

As we gathered around in the kitchen, the crunch of her unconventional chapati and the sweetness of tea loaded with sugar became more than just about the flavors; they were a connection we had to a woman whose love transcended the ordinary. In our memories, grandma's kitchen emerged as a sacred space where love, resilience and simplicity became our principles for a life well-lived.

Living with grandma was a journey in itself, one that was characterized with endurance, hope and the promise of family warmth waiting at the end of dusty roads. When the desire to visit her daughters, our aunts, stirred within her, she would extend an invitation, a simple question that held the promise of adventure: "Would you like to accompany me?"

As children, the thought of a trip with grandma was pure joy, a break from our daily routines. Our destination was Nyamotambe village, which is where her daughter, our host, resided. We were filled with excitement, and eagerly agreed upon this adventure. It wasn't just a mere trip; it was more like a cherished tradition.

The day of the trip arrived upon sunrise, the air crisp with the promise of an exciting adventure. There were no cars or buses to carry us away to our destination; the only mode of transport we had to rely on were our own two feet. The roads, especially during the rainy season, became muddy, slippery and unstable. Yet, undeterred, we set forth on our journey regardless, walking alongside grandma, with her leading the way.

As the day went by and we grew tired in the middle of our journey impatient no longer, we would ask, "Grandma, how much farther do we have to go?" Her response, a beacon of hope, she would point to a distant landmark—a tree on the horizon. "See that tree over there? That's where we're going." Filled with renewed hope, we pressed on, moving along, our determination fueled by the prospect of reaching that distant tree.

But unfortunately for us, the tree grandma pointed to remained an illusion, like a mirage in the distance. As the day went by and we grew even tired, grandma's encouragement rang out through our weary journey. "Can you see that big tree in the middle of those small trees? That's where we're going." Her promise of arrival became a chorus, repeated every time we asked, but the goal never quite seemed to be within reach.

Nightfall left us no choice but to seek refuge with relatives who

resided along the way, a temporary relief from the endless journey. Morning would come, and we'd pick up on our journey once again, the road ahead seeming like a never-ending story

Walking from Mogabiri village, where we lived with grandma, to Nyamotambe village, our destination, became a tale outlined into our memories—a journey that required resilience, patience and the enduring bond between generations. The experience was both a challenge and a privilege, a shared adventure that bound us to grandma in a way that words could not capture.

As the years passed, the newness of the journey wore off. The next time grandma extended her invitation, the memories of the difficult trek would flood our memories, and we would politely decline. Yet, in those moments of refusal, there was a quiet acknowledgment of the unique connection forged among us during those walks—the shared laughter, the collective exhaustion and the joy of finally arriving at our destination.

In grandma's company, the journey was more than just about the physical distance covered; it was a metaphor for the sense of endurance and love that defined our family. And in Nyamotambe village, the reward for our perseverance awaited—a feast of delicious foods prepared by our hosts, her daughter and grandchildren, a celebration of the bonds that transcended the trials we had to endure along the way to there.

In the heart of grandma's world, life followed the cycles of the farm—a sacred plot where food grew. Every day, without fail, grandma would go to the fields, showing her strong belief in the importance of providing plenty of food for her family herself.

The sweet potatoes harvested from our farm were more than just a crop; they were the result of grandma's hard work. She planted them strategically, ensuring each season provided enough produce to last us until the next, creating a steady supply for our daily needs. As I think back to those moments, I can almost feel the cool soil between my fingers, learning from grandma the delicate art of planting sweet

potatoes—a skill that has become a part of my personal journey.

Cassava, another gift from the farm found a permanent place on our table thanks to grandma's daily toil in the fields. Vegetables, of different varieties were tended to with the same care. In her wisdom, she would say, "A good wife is the one who works in the farm to ensure that her family has enough food to eat." To grandma, strength wasn't just measured in physical might but in the ability to nurture life from the soil.

Her definition of a strong woman wasn't limited to grand acts like physical strength or the ability to organize community events; it was written in the rows of crops that stood tall in the face of changing seasons. It was drawn in the daily routines, in the commitment to ensuring that no one in the family would go hungry.

I can still picture her, against the morning sun, working the land from sunrise till noon, and sometimes, even into the afternoon. As a child, I would accompany her to the farm, admiring at the small yet bountiful plot she would cultivate. It was like a classroom where lessons in hard work, patience and self-sufficiency unfolded with every plow of the soil.

And there she would be, amidst the fertile crops, seated under the shade of plantain trees, a picture of contentment. Her smoking pipe, a constant companion on this journey of providing sustenance for us, would be lit, the fragrant smoke hovering around her as she took a moment to reflect on the fruits of her labor.

In that farm, grandma painted a portrait of strength—one that went far beyond the boundaries of the fields. It was a lesson that transcended generations, teaching me not just how to cultivate the land but, along it, a sense of resilience and gratitude. Today, as I grow sweet potatoes, I carry with me the legacy of a woman who believed that the true measure of strength lays in the ability to nurture and provide for those you love.

In grandma's wisdom, there was a blend of the supernatural and the



practical that created a story that left me in constant awe. Her knowledge, like a well-tended garden, grew from a deep connection to the rhythms of nature.

I marveled at her ability to read time in the subtle language of the sun. By merely gazing at its position in the sky or looking at a shadow, she could tell you the exact hour with weird accuracy. If ever you questioned her, doubting the reliability of such an ancient way of telling time, she would give the liberty to pull out your watch, only to find that her wisdom in relation to the sun were in perfect harmony.

The weather forecast, for grandma, was not just something she would figure out by watching the news or glancing at a smartphone app. She would cast her eyes to the heavens, observing the clouds' movement, and predict whether rain would grace our village or fall elsewhere. Her intuition, rooted in the traditions of the land, often proved more reliable than the most advanced meteorological instruments.

Then there were the hover flies, those delicate creatures that flitted and buzzed around us. To grandma, their buzzing was some form of communication from nature. When a hover fly bugged her ears, she would declare with certainty, "There will be visitors." The number of rounds the fly made served as a mysterious message, foretelling the size of the forthcoming gathering.

I couldn't help but be fascinated by this connection between the natural world and grandma's unusual instincts. It was as if she held a secret dialogue with the universe, cracking its messages in ways beyond my comprehension. As the hover flies fluttered about, grandma would make preparations for the anticipated visitors.

In those moments, our home would transform into a haven of warmth and hospitality. Grandma, with a foresight that bordered on the mystical, would ready herself for the impending arrivals. Money would be sought to buy meat, sleeping arrangements carefully laid out, and, ever the gracious hostess, she would even go out of her way to prepare a parting gift—sweet potatoes, something that the awaited guests would carry back home with them.

As the buzz of the hover flies influenced such mysterious predictions grandma's actions spoke of a deeper truth—that wisdom, often elusive and mysterious, is an intricate dance between the known and the unknown. Her ability to merge make sense of the practicalities of daily life with the help of nature reflected a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. Due to her unconventional ways and beliefs, she left me with a profound lesson that wisdom is not just found in books; it's written in the language of the earth and the whispers of the wind.

In the embrace of our home, beside the banana and plantain plantations, there were also mango trees an indication to nature's abundance. As the mango season came about the air would be filled with the sweet promise of juicy delights.

Grandma, ever the reasonable steward of the land, saw an opportunity in those juicy mangoes. She would carefully select the bigger ones, destined for the market, while the smaller, perhaps sweeter ones, would be left for us to enjoy. But, in the imaginative world of childhood, our desires led us to other plans.

With the audacity that only children possess, we came up with a plan to treat ourselves to the forbidden fruits—the big mangoes that grandma intended to sell. In our playful adventures, we would vanish from the house, leaving behind the echoes of our laughter. The mango trees, about ten in number, became our secret haven.

In those playful afternoons, with our voices fading into the distance, grandma, the guardian of our actions, would be alarmed by the silence. Knowing our penchant for the mango trees, she would begin searching for her wayward grandchildren. We thought we were clever, but grandma's intuition was a force to be reckoned with.

Under the shade of the mango trees, each of us would climb to our chosen perch, with the space between the trees serving as our imaginary barrier. Even in our quiet rebellion, communication flowed effortlessly from one treetop to another. It was an undercover

operation, a whispering exchange carried by the wind.

Grandma, undiscouraged by the height of the trees, would approach our refuge. Her aim being to throw pebbles at us made from the clay found in the soil at the farm. We, in our lively and playful nature, would climb higher, hide in the branches and leaves, giggling as we go.

From her vantage point below, grandma would scold us, her words a blend of warning and amusement. "It has been a while since I last punished you, it seems like you've forgotten what that feels like!" she would declare in the native language, "mbatemere kare mwebhere." And just like that, our rebellion would come to an end.

Grandma, with a spark in her eyes, would turn to head back home. As she retreated, we would get down from our perches, choosing a different route to race back home. We would arrive before her, the delight of our adventure still evident in our eyes. And, to our relief, grandma, with her boundless love, wouldn't continue scolding us. The day, shaded with the flavor of stolen mangoes, became a cherished chapter in our shared tales of childhood mischief.

To this day, a puzzling scene still haunts my memory a chapter of my past that goes way my understanding. It revolves around my grandma, an important pillar in our lives, whose actions stood at odds with the teachings of the church she faithfully attended.

Every Sunday, without fail, she would accompany my younger siblings, Michael and Godwin, to the church after I, my brother, Jesse and my sister, Winnie, had left to go live with our relatives. The church benches resonated with hymns, prayers, and the shared devotion of the congregation, yet, after the service, an unpleasant routine would follow. Grandma, with Michael and Godwin in tow, would head to a local establishment where traditional brews were being sold.

It was there where my two siblings, not yet having set foot in a classroom due to their young age, were introduced to the world of

alcohol. A paradox unfolded—a practice seemingly at odds with the values imparted in the sacred halls of worship they had just come from. Those were the times when our family was navigating the challenging aftermath of our father's passing, a time when Michael and Godwin had remained living with mom and grandma.

I could vividly recall mom's recounting of confrontations between grandma and our father, who struggled with alcoholism before his passing. The very brews grandma had once prepared and sold, now stood accused as contributors to our father's downfall. He, in turn, blamed it all on grandma, claiming that she had initiated him into the world of alcoholism.

Questions lingered in my mind, and I found myself pondering the incongruity of grandma doing the same with my two siblings at such a tender age. The very woman who urged our father to quit drinking seemed to be perpetuating a cycle that had already wreaked disorder in our family.

In moments of reflection, a verse from the Book of Proverbs 22:6 surfaces: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it." The unpleasantness in grandma's actions raises the complexity of upbringing—how early influences, whether intentional or accidental, shape the paths we tread in adulthood.

As I grapple with the discontentment of that chapter of our lives, I am reminded that, our stories, like life itself, often unfold in shades of gray rather than black and white. In the mystery of grandma's choices, I find a lesson—a reminder that understanding the difficulties of our shared history requires a fair share of balance between empathy and inquiry.

## **Uncle Tom's Culinary Fiefdom**

In our family, Uncle Tom, grandma's youngest child, my late father's younger brother, and the most favored child in grandma's eyes, was a complex presence. It seemed as though in her love for him, grandma

had built a fortress around his actions, one that allowed him to tread through life without consequence.

Even when he sold grandpa's house in town, a transgression that would have sparked outrage in any family, grandma had nothing to say against it. It was a decision masked in mystery, a chapter in our family's story that remained unquestioned, like a sacred vow of secrecy.

Life with Uncle Tom was a paradox, to say the least. Despite his status of being the favorite child to grandma, his visits brought a sense of expectation, especially for us, the children, who eagerly anticipated the joy of receiving gifts from an uncle we seldom saw. Yet, with each homecoming, our hope was put off with reality.

He would arrive empty-handed, and we, wide-eyed and hopeful, would await the gifts he had promised us upon visit. In his defense, Uncle Tom would weave tales of intentions—of wanting to buy us shoes but unable to see his plan through due to not being aware of our shoe sizes. To assuage our disappointment, he'd ask us to let him sketch our feet on a piece of paper, a makeshift template for the shoes he promised to bring upon his next visit.

As children, the prospect of owning new shoes was magical, a rarity in the village where such luxuries were scarce. Year after year, the act repeated itself. Uncle Tom, in his return, would explain that time had passed since he last saw us, and that he was uncertain if our feet had outgrown the previously drawn outlines or remained the same sizes as before. Once again, the pen and paper would make their appearance, and the cycle continued.

We, innocent in our excitement, believed in the sincerity of these promises. We were unaware that the ritual was nothing but empty promises a simulation that left us longing for gifts that never materialized. Uncle Tom played with our minds, spinning tales that became a cycle of unfulfilled expectations.

In the midst of it all, there was a silent ache, an unspoken

understanding that perhaps the promises were just that—words lost into the wind. Yet, in the name of childhood hope, we held on to the belief that one day, the footprints drawn on paper would prove to be useful.

In the backdrop of our village life, where miracles were found in small gestures, the absence of gifts from Uncle Tom became a silent void. And as we navigated the complexity of familial dynamics, we learned that love, even when lopsided, has its own mysterious ways of holding families together.

In the chapters of our family memories, my brother, Jesse, often recounts a moment that unveils the layers of Uncle Tom's complexity. It was during one of his annual leaves from work when he brought a radio as a gift for our father, a gesture that initially brought joy to our family.

Our father, a man who cherished simple gestures, was elated. He carried that happiness like a badge of honor, sharing with friends the story of his little brother's thoughtful gift. The radio, to him, seemed to mean more than just a mere device should have meant; it was a symbol of familial connection and love. One he cherished dearly.

However, the sweetness of this familial melody was disrupted when the strains of Uncle Tom's financial struggles came to light. As his annual leave drew to a close, the weight of responsibilities bore down on him, leading to an unexpected turn of events. Uncle Tom, in an uncharacteristic move, approached our father, expressing his need to reclaim the radio.

The joy that had adorned our father's face curdled into disbelief and, eventually, simmering anger. The radio, once a token of affection, became a point of contention. It was a moment that left us grappling with more than just the outcome of the exchange of a material possession; it raised questions about trust, sincerity and the complexities that define our relationships.

As I reflect on Uncle Tom's actions, I find myself wondering how he

got the courage to take back the radio, which he had gifted to my father. Was Uncle Tom, in these instances, wrestling with his own set of challenges, ones he never mentioned, and ones that transcended the surface of material exchange?

Based off those moments, I'm reminded of the Bible verse from the Book of Proverbs 17:17. It states that: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." In the midst of Uncle Tom's presence, the bonds of family endured, built on forgiveness and strength, and the ultimate acceptance that love, flawed as it may be, remains to be one of the ties that binds.

In the fade and flow of time, Uncle Tom's return home marked a shift in our family dynamics. The reasons behind his departure from his job remained veiled in mystery, a chapter left unread in the Book of our family's narrative. What was certain, however, was that he had come back to stay, settling into the rhythms of village life, and with the rest of the family.

Uncle Tom, a man who cherished the essence of his being, had a desire for life's indulgences—good food, a meticulous concern for his physical appearance and an inclination towards the cultivation of passion fruits and papayas. Yet, beyond it all, was his spirit of selfishness.

As the vines of passion fruits sprawled across the garden, and the papaya trees he had been nurturing began to bear fruit, Uncle Tom displayed an unusual way of claiming ownership to the fruits. With a marker pen in hand, he numbered each fruit, a silent declaration that each last one of the fruits was his and his alone. The garden, being in abundance, transformed into a fortress of exclusivity.

In his world, the concept of sharing seemed foreign, an anomaly that clashed with the individualistic boundaries he had set. As children, innocent in our understanding of such complexities, we found ourselves thrust into a reality that contradicted the principles that grandma and mom had instilled in us growing up.

Uncle Tom's passion fruits and papayas not only became produce, but also the cause of division, each numbered fruit a proof to the growing distance within our shared space. His warnings, delivered with a seriousness that seemed out of place in a home built on the norm of shared abundance, rang true in our ears. "Touch my fruits, and there will be consequences!" he would declare, his tone carrying a weight that belied the simplicity of the act.

In that atmosphere of exclusivity, the home that had once been a sanctuary of communal warmth now held pockets of isolation. The garden, once a symbol of life's generosity, became a reflection of the invisible fences that now sought to separate us.

As I reflect on those moments, I find relief in the words from the Book of Philippians 2:3-4, which state: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Uncle Tom's journey, a contrast to this biblical wisdom, served as a reminder that, even within the confines of family, the struggle between self-interest and collective well-being is a tale as old as time.

As the numbered fruits bore witness to the divisions in our midst, the recollection of grandma's teachings lingered about—a legacy of sharing, of embracing each other's burdens and of finding joy in collective abundance. Uncle Tom's presence, a nuanced chapter in our family story, revealed that even in the face of selfishness, the spirit of love and generosity, imprinted in our hearts by grandma's teachings, could not easily be erased.

In our day-to-day lives, Uncle Tom's character played out in comical, if not odd, notes. His selfishness, which extended far beyond the garden, was particularly evident in the way he would handle meat—a rare and valued food in our village back in the days.

Uncle Tom would buy meat and cook it with lots of chilies, making it extremely spicy. He did this intentionally so that no child, no matter how daring, could enjoy it. His cooking was so spicy that even



grandma and mom, who didn't like spicy food, couldn't eat it.

The process was always the same. Uncle Tom, the only cook, would prepare the meat alone. The smell of barbecue would be tempting, but the very spicy chilies made it impossible for everyone else to savor and enjoy the meat. He would then keep the remaining meat locked away in his bedroom, making sure no one else could have any.

Without modern conveniences like a refrigerator, Uncle Tom chose to store his meat in his room, which would be locked up when he wasn't around. The meat, kept away like this, eventually became a cause of scarcity in a place that used to have an abundance of said food.

Sefu, a cousin of mine who came to stay with us so he could re-sit his standard seven exams, together with Jesse didn't seem to mind the chili Uncle Tom would add to the meat, they took it upon themselves to wash the meat to reduce some its spiciness, just so they would be able to eat it. They would watch Uncle Tom carefully as he hid it away in his room and waited for the right moment to sneak in. Whenever he left the key unattended, they would take it, enter inside his locked room, and take the meat. They would then sneak away to enjoy it.

When Uncle Tom would return, his voice would rise in accusatory tones, demanding answers as to who had invaded his room while he was away. Silence became our ally, an unspoken pact to keep secret the food insurgency committed by Jesse and Sefu. Grandma, in her wisdom, would interject with probing questions, exposing the invalidity of Uncle Tom's claim.

In the heart of our family's kitchen, a tale unfolded, a questionable chapter in the book of our shared history. Uncle Tom, an enigmatic figure in the course of our daily lives, engaged in practices that left us all questioning the motives behind his unusual behavior.

The problem started with how he would handle meat. What was once a simple trip to the market turned into a careful process where he would choose specific cuts of meat that suited his liking, and then proceed to add lots of chilies to it so no one else would be able to savor

it. He would treat the whole act of buying and cooking meat not just as a way to acquire food to be savored by the entire family, but as a something personal.

During family gatherings, especially when Mom was busy preparing a big meal, things would often get chaotic. Uncle Tom, in particular, would start acting strangely. He had this habit of trying to grab the largest portion of meat for himself, leaving the rest of us with less, even though he hadn't contributed to buying it. And when he did buy meat, it was a completely different story—he would keep it all to himself, refusing to share, which was so unlike the way we were used to doing things as a family.

He would then cook his portion separately, adding onions, tomatoes and extra chilies to it, as if he was fixing something he thought was wrong with the shared dish. The kitchen, which used to be a place of shared enjoyment, became a space for him to fulfill his personal desires.

As children, we would sit back and watch quietly. Mom and grandma in their wisdom, trying to keep the peace, would not confront him. We couldn't help but wonder why things would happen the way they did.

It felt like a performance, with each act showing his clear desire to stand out and take control of something as simple as a meal. Despite this, we learned that even in difficult times, our family would still find joy and connection at the end of the day. The Bible reminds us in the Book of Ecclesiastes 3:1, "To everything, there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." Through these moments, we saw that even with challenges, we could still find joy and stay close as a family. Regardless of what would transpire between us.