

Born Too Soon, Loved Forever

A Story of Faith, Trauma and Triumph

By Sally Mbai

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This is a work of non-fiction. It is based on true events and the author's personal experiences. Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

Author's Dedication

This book is dedicated to every parent who has ever held their breath while watching their child fight for life, to those who have walked the long, uncertain roads of NICUs, therapies, late-night prayers, and quiet tears behind closed doors.

To the mothers who feel unheard.

To the fathers who stand strong, even when they're breaking inside.

To the families who have built a new definition of "normal."

And especially, to the children born too soon, the miracles who remind us every day that the smallest fighters are often the strongest.

This is also a love letter to my daughter, **Cindy**.

You came into the world under unimaginable odds.

You redefined everything I thought I knew about faith, hope, and unconditional love.

Your strength became my strength. Your smile lit up the darkest nights.

You are my miracle, not because of what you have overcome, but because of who you are.

To anyone holding this book in their hands, may it be a gentle reminder that you are not alone.

May you find courage in the pages, strength in the struggle, and hope in every chapter.

Your journey may not look like anyone else's, but it is sacred, it is valid, and it is beautiful.

Never stop believing, Never stop loving, and Never stop hoping.

With love and grace,

Sally Mbai

Author of Born Too Soon, Loved Forever

Author's Note

This book is based on a true story, my story. Each chapter offers a window into the real-life journey of raising my daughter, born at just 22 weeks and declared dead on arrival. It tells of the miraculous moment she came back to life and the relentless, faith-driven fight to help her to one day live a life as full and normal as any other child.

While some minor details may have been altered for privacy, the emotions, challenges, and triumphs shared here are drawn directly from my lived experience. I offer this story to every parent who has ever faced the unknown, held onto hope, or walked a path they never expected.

May you feel cherished, strengthened, and reminded that even in the darkest seasons, love can be a lifeline.

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Introduction

Born Too Soon, Loved Forever,

“A Story of Faith, Trauma and Triumph”

When I became pregnant with my first child, I expected the usual: a few months of nausea, a growing belly, and the joy of holding a newborn in my arms after nine months. What I didn't expect was to give birth at just 22 weeks, to a baby so small she could fit in the palm of my hand, one whom doctors declared stillborn... only to find her breathing moments later.

This book is the story of my daughter Cindy's fight for life, my spiritual journey through trauma, and the hard-won lessons that carried us through diagnosis, developmental delays, and years of therapy. But more than that, this is a book about love. The kind of love that heals, that anchors, and that never gives up, even when doctors do.

I wrote this for parents walking a similar path, the path of raising a child with special needs. If you've felt overwhelmed, afraid, misunderstood, or alone, I want you to know you're not. There is hope. There is strength. And yes, there is joy.

You will read our story, raw, unfiltered, and full of faith.

I'll share the practical things we learned: hospital survival tips, therapy routines, how to advocate for your child, and how to keep your soul from collapsing under the weight of fear and uncertainty.

Whether you're a parent, caregiver, or someone seeking to understand, may this story remind you that miracles still happen, that trauma doesn't have to break you, and that in God's hands, even a painfully slow journey can lead to a beautiful life.

This is our story. And if you're reading this, **welcome to it.**

□ Chapter 1: From Rome, Then the Test

In April 1997, I travelled to Rome, Italy, for a professional workshop. It was a beautiful and fulfilling trip, the kind that nourishes both the mind and soul. The cobbled streets, the scent of fresh espresso, the distant hum of church bells, everything about Rome whispered of history, beauty, and possibility. I returned home inspired, filled with gratitude for the experience.

But shortly after my return, I noticed something unusual, my period didn't come. At first, I blamed it on jet lag, travel fatigue, or the stress of juggling work and home. But then I began spotting. A quiet warning. Subtle, but enough to make me pause.

I took a pregnancy test.

Positive. I was pregnant, our first child.

It's hard to put into words what that moment felt like. Joy doesn't even begin to describe it. It was as if time stood still. I held the test in my hands, heart racing, eyes filling with tears.

I called my husband, my voice trembling with excitement. ***We're going to have a baby.***

From that moment, everything changed. I stepped into the world of motherhood with wide eyes and a full heart. Like many first-time mothers, I dove into antenatal care immediately.

Every doctor's appointment was an adventure, every scan a sacred glimpse into the little life growing inside me.

I started journaling my experiences, rubbing my belly each night as if to silently whisper, *I'm here. I love you already.*

My husband and I embraced the pregnancy with hope, laughter, and dreams about the future.

We imagined names, painted pictures in our minds of tiny hands, midnight feeds, and first steps. The weeks passed uneventfully, and everything seemed perfectly normal. We were finally building our family, and everything felt just right.

But around 19 weeks, my body began to send quiet warnings. At first, it was just a nagging fatigue, deeper than usual, and a dull ache in my lower abdomen. I brushed it off, telling myself it was all part of the journey. Still, the discomfort lingered. My instincts stirred.

I scheduled a visit to my gynecologist. She examined me thoroughly, checked the baby, and gently reassured me: *Everything looks fine. You're just tired. Rest more.* I left her Clinic comforted, but a small voice inside me still whispered, *Something isn't right.*

Even so, I carried on working my usual hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., determined to maintain my routine. I was exhausted, but I pressed on, telling myself I was strong, telling myself that pregnant women worked every day. I had no idea that my body was already warning me of what was to come. That beneath the normal scans and smiling reassurances, something delicate and unseen was shifting.

At the time, I had no language for what I was feeling, no map for the road I was about to walk.

I was a first-time mother, full of love and expectation, and completely unaware that my world was about to turn inside out.

□ Chapter 2: Swollen Feet & Ignored Warnings

The pregnancy felt ordinary, until it wasn't.

At the beginning of the 20 week, I began to notice my feet swelling. It started mildly but soon became more pronounced. The lower abdominal discomfort persisted, Concerned, I scheduled another visit to my gynecologist. She gave me a thorough check-up, examined the baby, and assured me that everything looked fine. “You just need to rest,” she said. Her tone was calm. Reassuring. And I wanted to believe her.

So I went back to my usual routine. I was still working full-time, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. I told myself the fatigue was normal. After all, pregnancy was supposed to be exhausting, wasn't it?

At the end of the 20th week, I hosted a family dinner at home. It was a Thursday. I'd returned from work at 5:30 p.m., rolled up my sleeves, and prepared a full spread: soft chapatis, steamed rice, and a rich meat stew. My in-laws and a few family friends joined us, and the evening felt warm, familiar, joyful.

But as I sat opposite my brother-in-law from the U.S., he looked at my legs, now noticeably swollen, and his smile faded. “There's something wrong with your body,” he said bluntly. “You need a second opinion.”

I dismissed him gently. “I just saw my gynecologist two days ago. She said I'm fine.”

But he wouldn't let it go. “I don't agree. You look unwell.”

We brushed off the concern, finished dinner, and said our goodbyes around 10:00 p.m. I didn't sleep until 11:30 p.m. exhausted but satisfied the evening had gone well.

The next morning, Friday, I woke up feeling more drained than ever. Every step was heavy. But I got dressed and went to work. I reminded myself that the weekend was around the corner. Just one more day of pushing through, I thought.

That evening, my husband came home with news: his mother had organized a family lunch in the countryside for Saturday. It was meant as a farewell for my brother-in-law before he flew back to America.

"We all have to go," he said.

I begged him to let me stay behind. "I'm too tired," I whispered, hoping he'd notice the weariness in my voice. But he insisted, and out of respect, I agreed.

Saturday morning, we traveled to the village. I expected to find the whole family gathered, but to my surprise, it was only the four of us, my mother-in-law, my husband, my brother-in-law, and me, along with a few of her friends and workers. Despite my exhaustion, I helped with the chores. There was no space for rest. By the time we returned to Nairobi that evening, my body was completely worn down.

My feet were now so swollen that even standing was painful. I didn't know it then, but my body had been crying out for help, and I hadn't listened.

Sunday came, and I went to church. I prayed, sang softly, and sat through the service in silence. That afternoon, I finally allowed myself to rest, but my body still felt weighed down.

Monday arrived. I returned to work.

That evening, my husband was delayed, picking me from work, so I had to take public transport home. I stood for nearly an hour at Kencom Bus Station watching full bus after full bus pass me by.

Eventually, I forced myself onto a crowded bus, hanging onto the side pedal, standing the entire ride from Nairobi's CBD to our home in Southlands Estate Langata.

I arrived home around 7:00 p.m., made dinner, ate, and went to bed by 9:00 p.m.

At 11:00 p.m., my husband walked in the bedroom. I got up to use the toilet, but as I stood up, something warm gushed down my legs and onto the floor. At first, I thought it was urine. But then I noticed, it didn't stop. Even after I felt I had emptied my bladder, the fluid kept flowing.

I stood frozen in confusion. My husband stared at the puddle on the floor. Then we both looked at each other, panic rising.

Something was wrong. Seriously wrong.

We called my gynecologist. When she heard what happened, her voice rose in alarm,

“The baby is coming!”

I stammered, “But I'm only 21 weeks...”

There was a pause. Then she said firmly, “Get to the hospital. Right now.”

□Chapter 3: The Long Night and the Broken Waters

The hospital was quiet when we arrived, eerily so. It was just past midnight. A nurse led me into the general ward, not the maternity unit. I was confused.

“This isn’t the maternity ward?” I asked.

She shook her head. “We only admit expectant mothers from 27 weeks and above. At 21 weeks, this is considered a miscarriage. You’ll be admitted here.”

A miscarriage?

My heart sank. I wasn’t losing a pregnancy, I was carrying a child. A daughter I had already prayed for, dreamed about, and loved deeply. But in the medical system, the line between life and loss had already been drawn. My baby hadn’t reached “viability.” That word viability suddenly felt cruel.

I was placed in a bed among other women with various illnesses, some coughing, some groaning, and some sleeping. The environment was far from peaceful. The overhead lights flickered. A faint antiseptic smell hung in the air. I lay there, the fluid had stopped leaking, trying to process the weight of everything.

My Doctor gynecologist arrived later that night. She examined me and delivered the news calmly, but firmly.

“Your amniotic sac has ruptured,” she said. “The baby is still too small to survive outside the womb. But we’ll do everything we can to prolong the pregnancy.”

"My gynecologist knew my husband and I personally, our hopes, our struggles, our faith. While the nurses treated this as just another pregnancy to be quietly discarded, the doctor met my eyes with calm resolve and said, 'I don't believe in ending life. It is sacred. Only God gives it and only He has the right to take it away.'" Then, softening her tone, she asked, "Do you have a Bible with you?"

"Yes," I whispered.

"Good," she nodded. "You're going to need it. Prayer, faith, and hope, they work in ways even medicine can't explain."

There was little they could offer in terms of intervention. I was put on bed rest and started on antibiotics to prevent infection. I wasn't allowed to walk unless absolutely necessary. Every hour became a delicate dance between hope and heartbreak.

At night, I lay still in the unfamiliar hospital bed, trying to muffle my tears as other patients slept or moaned nearby. I prayed, not knowing what to ask for.

Was it a miracle? Time? Strength to face whatever was coming?

The Days That Followed passed in a haze.

The fluid had slowed to a stop, with only a few tiny drops appearing when my belly shifted, which I assumed was the baby moving.

And with every drop, it felt like my baby was slipping further away... and so was my hope.

The nurses monitored my temperature and blood pressure regularly. Any sign of fever could mean infection, a danger to both the baby and me.

Every day, I waited for signs of movement. Every small flutter in my womb felt like a whispered promise: I'm still here, Mama.

Family visited, offering food, support, and prayers, but rarely asked hard questions. No one dared say aloud what we were all thinking.

The general ward, though full of people, felt lonely.

One afternoon, the doctor scheduled a counseling session to help me prepare for what they clearly believed was inevitable. The therapist, trying to sound comforting, said, "You're young, you'll have other babies." But her words, paired with the quiet resignation in her eyes and the solemn silence between her and my doctor, told me the truth they weren't saying out loud: they didn't expect my baby to survive. But in that moment, I turned inward and clung to the One who I hadn't, I knew that where man's limits ended, God's power could begin.

□ Chapter 4: Dawn of the Unthinkable

The following morning, just before dawn, around 6 a.m. the pain hit me like a tidal wave. It wasn't subtle anymore. These were deep, intense labor pains, and they came fast and hard. I curled on my side, clinging to the thin hospital sheet, biting my lip to keep from crying out too loud.

I wasn't alone in the ward. In the next bed was an elderly woman in her late 40s, admitted with pneumonia. She watched me with growing concern as I twisted in pain. Despite her own sickness, she sat up, leaned toward me, and asked gently, "My dear, why are you in so much pain? Why is no one attending to you?"

I explained in gasps that my water had broken over a week ago. That I was trying to hold onto the pregnancy until at least seven months. That I was on strict bed rest. That the baby was only 22 weeks old today.

She listened quietly, then said something that caught me off guard: "I'm a pastor's wife. I've given birth to four children, and my daughter, this is not how labor is supposed to feel. Something is not right. I'm going to pray for you."

She knelt beside my hospital bed, in that crowded, under-equipped general ward, and prayed. Her voice was low but firm, full of compassion and urgency. I clutched my belly and silently begged God to hear her.

When she finished, she looked me in the eyes. "Call your people. Call your mother. This is serious. Don't wait."

The nurse on duty was reluctant at first, but eventually allowed me to make one phone call. I spoke to my sister, who was at work. She said she would send someone to our rural home to bring my mother, but even then, I knew: it would take at least two days for her to arrive.

I was alone again. And the pain was only getting worse.

Hours passed. I was drenched in sweat. I felt dizzy and weak. No one was monitoring the baby. No one was checking for dilation. I started to wonder if they'd simply given up on us.

Finally, around 3 p.m., my doctor arrived.

She examined me and gave me an injection. Later, the neonatologist would explain what it was: **a corticosteroid** to accelerate lung development, a last-minute effort to prepare the baby for delivery. Preterm babies often die because their lungs are too fragile. They rupture under pressure. This injection was a desperate attempt to give my baby even a tiny chance.

By 5:30 p.m., they wheeled me from the general ward to the maternity labor room.

There was no warm welcome. No flurry of excited nurses. Just quiet professionals who looked unsure of what to do with a mother delivering a child too small to be called viable.

I was placed on the delivery bed. I remember hearing the doctors talking in hushed voices in the background.

One of them said: "It might not be logical to perform a C-section. The baby is too small, survival chances are minimal.

And this is her first child, doing a cesarean now may mean all her future deliveries must be by cesarean too.”

And just like that, the decision was made. No cesarean.

I was given another injection to intensify the labor.

By 6 p.m., my baby girl was born.

She didn’t cry.

She didn’t move.

She was tiny, just 900 grams.

She was barely the length of my forearm. Fitting on my palm,
Her skin was translucent, her limbs impossibly thin.

The doctor pronounced her stillborn. They tried resuscitating her, but nothing worked. I watched from the delivery bed, numb, as they placed her in a small plastic basin, next to me. No incubator. No swaddling. Just a quiet body, still and alone. One of the nurses shook her head and documented her as a stillbirth.

Declared Dead... But I Wasn’t Done Hoping

The doctor looked at me and said flatly, “Your baby is dead.”

A sound came out of me, a cry from somewhere deep and broken.

Then words I didn’t plan or think about burst from my lips: ***“My God, You know how much I need a baby. Why this? Why now? But let Your will be done.”***

The weight of it all fell over me. I had carried her. Fought for her. Prayed for her. And now she was gone?

I asked them not to remove her yet. I told the doctor and nurse, “Wait for my husband to arrive. Then we’ll decide together what to do with her remains.”

“And so, she was gently placed in a small plastic basin, so tiny she could fit perfectly in the palm of my hand, her fragile form looked almost too delicate for this world, like an unfinished sketch.

A tiny nose, the faintest mouth, and eyes no bigger than a pen’s dot rested on her translucent skin, features so small and still, they seemed like whispers of a life that had slipped away before it could begin.

Her head was small, with fine veins visible beneath the surface, her fingers were no larger than grains of long rice, and her body was barely formed, no visible buttocks, just faint markings where life was still trying to take shape. I was wheeled out of the delivery room in silence, to my bed in the maternity ward, arms empty, heart shattered.”

What happened next would defy everything they believed about 22-week babies.

□ Chapter 5: The Cry That Brought Her Back

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” – Psalm 30:5 (KJV)

At around 7:00 p.m., I heard the unmistakable sound of a baby crying, a faint but piercing cry shattered the stillness, a fragile, desperate wail that cut through the stillness like a knife.

Suddenly, there was commotion in the nurses' and doctors' lobby. Raised voices echoed through the corridor. I overheard the senior doctor shouting angrily, “This is a hospital! Our duty is to save lives by whatever means, not to kill! Why was this baby not put on oxygen?”

I lay frozen in my bed, too weak to move, but my ears strained to catch every word. In hushed, hurried tones, the nurses, hospital matron, and other staff seemed to be trying to explain themselves. Their voices were low, disjointed, I couldn't make out what they were saying.

A short while later, the nurse who had delivered my baby entered my room. Her expression was different, serious, almost apologetic. Gently, she said, “I'd like to take you to see something.” I hesitated, exhausted from vomiting, laboring, and the trauma of the day. I was weak, emotionally drained, and barely holding myself together. “What's there to see?” I asked her. “My baby is dead. Just wait for the father.”

But she persisted, assuring me she would support me physically if I couldn't walk on my own. Reluctantly, and with her help,

I rose to my feet. We walked slowly toward the nursery, my legs shaky, my heart heavy.

Inside the nursery were several incubators holding premature babies. But one caught my attention immediately, a tiny, dark, skinny figure that barely resembled a baby.

There was no visible baby flesh, just fragile skin stretched over bones. No eyes. No nose. No ears. Just movement, frantic, desperate, rapid. Tubes ran in and out of her body. An oxygen mask was pressed over her face. A syringe with flowing medicine connected to a tiny vein.

The nurse brought me closer to the incubator and said softly, “Here is your baby.”

I gasped in disbelief. “It can’t be. You told me she was dead!”

“Yes,” she admitted, “we did. After delivery, we left the baby in the room and locked it as we went about other duties. When I returned after about thirty minutes to collect the body for disposal, I found her... gasping for air.”

Her voice trembled as she continued. “So I rushed her to the incubator and put her on oxygen. And here she is... breathing.”

I broke down. My knees buckled, and the tears came in waves. “Why?” I cried. “Why are you torturing her? You know she won’t survive. Why give her hope?”

As if on cue, my husband and the doctor walked in.

The room shifted from a place of mourning to one of emergency, from grieving a death to rallying around a life that had refused to give up. The focus turned to keeping her alive.

The doctors looked concerned and cautious. “She’s 22 weeks old,” one of them said. “We’ve never handled a case this early.

This is, in fact, the youngest and smallest baby to ever survive delivery at this hospital, possibly in the entire country.”

I was taken back to my room, overwhelmed and disoriented. Not long after, I developed **postpartum hemorrhage** (PPH).

I was bleeding profusely, and my condition became critical. In a desperate attempt to stop the bleeding, the nurses inserted layers of cotton wool into my uterus to apply pressure on the bleeding veins. Miraculously, it seemed to work, at least for the moment.

But the physical pain was nothing compared to the emotional storm swirling inside me. I lay in that hospital bed unsure whether to hope or to brace myself for loss. My body was weak, but my mind was racing. The day had begun with labor, followed by the grief of losing a child, and now, somehow, ended with the possibility, however small, that my baby was alive.

And yet, I couldn't shake the fear: was this a miracle in motion, or just a temporary flicker before the flame went out?

The room was quiet except for the occasional shuffle of nurses' shoes and the distant beeping of machines from the nursery. My body was numb from exhaustion, pain, and disbelief.

My mind was spinning, trying to comprehend what had just unfolded, from being told my baby was dead, to standing before this fragile, fluttering life form now fighting for survival. I couldn't decide whether to feel grateful or terrified. The weight of the unknown pressed down on my chest like a heavy stone.

The bleeding seemed to have subsided, and the nurses kept checking my vitals every half hour. But mentally, I was nowhere near stable.

Every time I closed my eyes, I saw her, tiny, frail, struggling for breath. I kept asking myself if this was mercy or cruelty. Was she meant to survive this world, or were we selfishly keeping her tethered to life through machines and tubes?

That night, sleep didn't come. I lay in bed staring at the ceiling, listening to the rhythmic tick of the wall clock and the murmur of nurses outside my door.

Every few minutes, I imagined hearing her cry, though I knew at her size and fragility, she couldn't possibly cry like a full-term baby. The trauma of the day, the labor, the hemorrhage, the shocking twist on my baby's fate, all played in a continuous loop in my mind.

The next morning, the pediatric team gathered with my husband and I.

Their faces were serious, their voices calm but laced with uncertainty. "She's very premature, born at 22 weeks," one of the senior doctors explained. "This is uncharted territory for us.

We've never had a baby this early survive here. The next 48 hours are critical."

He paused, looked at us both, and continued.

"There will be many complications... lung immaturity, risk of brain bleeds, infections... we're not sure how her organs will cope." My husband held my hand tightly, and I could feel him trembling.

I couldn't speak. I just nodded slowly, my heart sinking lower with every word.

Another doctor spoke, this time a neonatologist who had been brought in from a referral hospital. "She's a fighter, there's no doubt about that. But we'll need your consent for intensive care, and for us to attempt full resuscitation and life-support measures going forward. The costs, emotionally and financially, can be high. We need you to be prepared."

Prepared? How could anyone prepare for this?

We signed the forms. I remember the pen trembling in my hand as I scribbled my name on the dotted line. Not out of confidence or hope, but because I knew I couldn't live with the guilt of not trying. If she was going to fight, then so would we.

Later that day, I was wheeled to the nursery again. I stared at her, still nameless, this little miracle suspended in a sea of tubes and wires. She was barely the size of my palm. Her skin was translucent, her eyes sealed shut. Her chest rose and fell rapidly with every assisted breath.

One of the nurses gently asked, “Do you have a name for her?”

I hesitated. How do you name someone you’re afraid might not survive?

Then it came to me, softly, like a whisper from somewhere deep within.

Hope (meaning optimism)

I turned to the nurse and said, “Her name is **Hope.**”

She nodded with a warm smile. “Then we’ll call her **Hope.**”

And so began the longest journey of our lives — one day at a time, one breath at a time.

□ Chapter 6: Hope in the Hollow

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

Morning came, but it brought no clarity, only more questions, more uncertainty. I stared out of the hospital window at the rising sun, wondering if it symbolized a new beginning or simply another chapter of heartbreak. My body was weak, and I was still reeling from the hemorrhage, but my thoughts were fixated on one thing: the tiny baby fighting for breath in that nursery.

The pediatric team returned, this time more composed. A group of five stood before us, doctors, nurses, and a neonatal specialist who had been called in from a referral hospital. Their faces wore the delicate balance of professionalism and compassion. They weren't here to give us hope or despair, just facts.

“She is extremely premature,” one of the doctors began. “At 22 weeks, her organs are not fully developed. She's in critical condition. The next 48 to 72 hours are crucial, we call it the golden window. If she makes it past this period, then we can start thinking about long-term care. But even then, there are no guarantees.”

The neonatologist took over. “She is the smallest baby we've ever had to support”.

The machines are too big for her. The oxygen settings, the IV lines, everything has to be improvised. But she's trying. Her heart rate is strong. She's breathing with assistance.

She wants to live.”

There was a long pause.

“We need to ask for your consent, to keep her on life support, to administer surfactant for her lungs, to monitor her around the clock.

There may be complications: brain bleeds, organ failure, infections, developmental challenges if she survives. “We want you to understand the emotional and financial toll this may take on your family.”

Emotionally? I was already drained. Financially? We had no plan. Spiritually? I was torn between surrender and desperation. But when the doctor looked me in the eye and asked if we wanted them to continue trying, I knew my answer.

“Yes,” I whispered. “Do everything you can. She wants to live. We’ll fight with her.”

And that was it. Papers were signed. Machines were adjusted. Nurses were assigned shifts around the clock. And the battle began, a battle waged in silence, in beeping monitors, in milliliters of medication, and in prayers whispered through tears.

I was wheeled back into the nursery later that day. I sat beside her incubator and simply watched. Her body was almost translucent.

Her skin looked as though it could tear at the slightest touch. Her fingers, no bigger than grains of rice, twitched occasionally. Her chest moved quickly, her breath forced through the ventilator.

I was told her weight had dropped to just 540 grams, barely more than a loaf of bread.

Another nurse leaned in and asked gently, “Have you named her?”

I had been too afraid even to say the name. A name felt like a commitment I wasn’t sure I was strong enough to make. What if I called her and lost her?

But deep inside, born out of that sliver of defiance I saw in her movement. I looked at the nurse and said, quietly but firmly, “Her name is **Hope**.”

The nurse smiled, tears glistening in her eyes. “Then **Hope** it is.”

The following days, melted into each other. Mornings and nights became meaningless, everything was measured in heart rates, oxygen saturation, feed tolerance, and blood results. I was discharged from the maternity ward, but I refused to go home. My body needed rest, but my soul needed to be near Hope.

Thankfully, the hospital allowed me to remain in a small room within the maternity wing. It had no luxuries, just a worn-out bed, a plastic chair, and a sink, but it became my war room.

I set alarms throughout the night, so I could walk to the nursery every three hours. Even when I couldn’t do anything, I just sat beside her and prayed.

The nurses started referring to her as “our miracle girl.” Word spread across the hospital, doctors from other departments came to catch a glimpse of the tiniest patient the facility had ever seen.

Some marveled, some whispered quietly, “She won’t make it.” Others offered silent support.

On the fourth day, just as I began to settle into this rhythm of hope and fragility, everything changed.

I walked into the nursery and immediately sensed something was wrong. The mood was tense. The nurse on duty wouldn’t meet my eyes. Hope’s monitor was beeping erratically. Her oxygen saturation was dropping fast. Her tiny body was turning bluish around the mouth.

“She’s desaturating!” one nurse shouted. “Call the doctor now!”

I froze. My heart pounded. The room spun. A doctor rushed in and began issuing rapid instructions. They adjusted the ventilator settings, drew blood, injected emergency medication.

I wanted to scream, to reach in and hold her, but I was helpless. My baby was dying before my eyes.

The neonatologist finally turned to me, her voice grim. “She has developed a **pneumothorax**, air has leaked into the space between her lung and chest wall. Her lungs are too delicate. We need to insert a chest tube, immediately.”

I nodded, numb. I didn’t understand the procedure, but I understood the urgency.

They asked me to step out. I paced the corridor like a caged animal, hands clasped, whispering prayers I didn’t even know I remembered. “God, not now. Not after this far. Please.”

Thirty minutes later, the doctor came out. “She’s stable, for now,” she said. “The chest tube worked. But we’re not out of danger yet.

We’ll need to keep her sedated, and under close observation. Her lungs are severely underdeveloped. Every day is a gift.”

And so, we marked time not in weeks or months, but in moments.

"When my mother arrived at the hospital and saw the baby, she broke down in tears. I had already cried for days and had finally gathered the strength to face reality, so her sorrow unsettled me. In that moment, I didn’t need pity; I needed courage. Years later, I understand her grief in a way I couldn’t back then."

But on the sixth day, there was a glimmer of light.

“She passed some stool,” the nurse said with a small smile. “And a little urine.”

The doctors were thrilled. “This means her digestive system is beginning to function. We can now focus on building her weight again.”

That tiny sign of life gave them joy, but it wasn’t enough to silence the fear that consumed me.

Some days were victories: She tolerated her first drop of breast milk through a feeding tube. She opened one eye for a split second. She gained 20 grams.

Other days were terrifying: An infection. A sudden drop in blood pressure. A machine malfunction. A collapsed vein. A blood transfusion.

But through it all, she fought.

And through it all, I discovered a kind of strength I never knew I had.

As the days passed, I began to learn the rhythms of the NICU, the hum of machines, the coded beeps, the meaning behind every red or green light. I started to understand medical terms that once felt foreign: bradycardia, desaturation, apnea, sepsis. Words I never imagined would become part of my daily vocabulary were now tattooed on my heart.

I watched as nurses handled Hope like a delicate treasure. Their hands moved with such precision and care, adjusting tubes, measuring feeds, and charting every detail. I admired them deeply, not just for their skill, but for their gentleness.

They didn't just treat Hope like a patient; they treated her like she mattered, like she was someone worth fighting for.

Slowly, I was invited into her care.

At first, it was simple, learning how to clean the edges of her mouth with a cotton swab, helping change her micro-sized diaper, placing drops of expressed milk through her feeding tube. Each act, though small, felt monumental.

Then came kangaroo care, skin-to-skin contact. The first time they placed Hope on my chest, I was terrified.

She was still under 900 grams, wrapped in wires and tape, her skin translucent and fragile.

But the moment her tiny body rested against mine, something sacred happened. Her heartbeat calmed. Her breathing steadied.

And I, who had been shattered in so many places, began to feel whole again.

Holding her became the highlight of my days. Even for ten or fifteen minutes at a time, I would sit motionless, barely breathing, as if I could anchor her life with my own. I whispered prayers over her, sometimes aloud, sometimes silently. “You’re strong. You’re loved. You’re not alone.”

But the fear never truly left.

Every cough, every beep, every change in her chart sent a fresh wave of anxiety crashing over me. I remember one night, just as I was drifting off to sleep in my little room, a knock came at the door. My heart sank. It was the nurse.

“She’s having trouble again. The doctor needs you.”

That walk down the dim hallway felt like a march toward heartbreak.

I arrived to find Hope surrounded by a flurry of hands and quiet commands. Her oxygen had plummeted. Her little chest wasn’t rising properly.

They were suctioning her lungs, trying to clear a mucus plug. One nurse gently pulled me aside. “You may want to talk to her. Sometimes, hearing her mother’s voice helps.”

So I stood by the incubator and whispered, “Hope, Mama is here”. I see you. I love you. You are not alone.”

And somehow, her numbers stabilized again.

It felt like a sacred dance, the medical and the miraculous, the science and the spirit. She was not surviving by machines alone. She was being held up by prayer, by love, by something greater than all of us.

Still, I grieved quietly.

I grieved for the birth experience I never had, no joyful cries, no cuddles, no first photos or warm blankets. I grieved for my body that had failed to protect her to term. I grieved every time I left the NICU without her, while other mothers carried their newborns home.

But alongside the grief, something else was growing.

Faith.

It wasn’t loud or showy. It didn’t always feel like certainty. Sometimes it was just the decision to show up, to keep sitting by the incubator, to whisper life into lungs that barely had the strength to breathe.

But it was faith nonetheless.

And so, day by day, gram by gram, breath by breath, Hope kept living.

And so did I.

After weeks of uncertainty, one morning brought a moment I'll never forget.

The nurse greeted me at the nursery door with a beaming smile. "She crossed 1 kilogram," she said, almost singing the words. "1.03 to be exact!"

I gasped. It felt like hearing someone had just told me she could fly. One kilogram may seem small to others, but to us, it was a mountain climbed, a silent victory over death, day by day, gram by gram. Nurses clapped softly, the doctor gave a nod of approval, and I cried.

Not tears of fear this time.

Tears of relief. Of gratitude. Of awe.

I stood over her incubator, whispered, "You did it, baby girl. You're growing."

That small number on the scale changed everything. It meant fewer risks during procedures. It meant more nutrition. It meant her tiny body was starting to fight with strength of its own.

It also meant one very emotional moment for me, the removal of her ventilator.

The neonatologist had been monitoring her lungs closely. "We think she's ready to breathe on her own," he said cautiously.

“We’ll keep CPAP support in place, but no more intubation. Her lungs are responding well.”

When they removed the tube from her mouth, Hope let out the tiniest cry, like a kitten's whimper, but to me, it was the loudest, most beautiful sound I’d ever heard.

It was the first time I heard my baby’s voice.

I covered my mouth and wept uncontrollably.

That sound, fragile, strained, but unmistakably hers, shattered something in me. Not in a painful way, but like a breaking open. A release.

For the first time since she was born, I truly believed she might make it. That this story, our story, would not end in a grave but in glory.

I started to keep a journal. I wrote letters to her every night. Sometimes they were full of gratitude, other times they were raw and angry, but they were honest.

***Dear Hope**, today you opened one eye and tried to grip my finger. I don’t know how much you see or feel, but I hope you know how deeply you are loved.*

***Dear Hope**, I’m terrified again. You spiked a fever and they suspect an infection. I feel helpless. But I’m here. I won’t leave you.*

It was therapy for me, a way to bleed out the fears, the doubts, the exhaustion. I realized I wasn’t just watching my baby grow.

I was healing too. I had entered that NICU broken, traumatized, uncertain of who I was or what I believed. But in caring for her, I was also slowly mothering myself back to life.

One night, as I sat beside her incubator, I realized something profound: this child, whom I once feared would be too broken to live, was the very source of my restoration. She didn't just survive. She transformed me.

Hope was more than her name.

She was a declaration.

As Hope grew stronger, our days slowly shifted from emergency interventions to fragile routines. She no longer needed full respiratory support, now she was on nasal oxygen, her breaths unassisted, her lungs gaining strength with every hour.

Her tiny mouth still carried the feeding tube, but I gently tried to coax her into sucking, a simple act most babies are born knowing.

But her muscles were fragile, barely formed, and her lips trembled with effort. She couldn't suck, not yet. Her body just wasn't ready. It broke me in ways I can't explain, watching her struggle with something so instinctive, so human.

With time I became more hands-on in her care. I learned to give her sponge baths, change her nappies, monitor her feeds, and even take her temperature under the nurse's supervision.

I was no longer just a mother visiting the NICU, I was a mother preparing to take her home.

But the joy of her progress was entangled with a new kind of fear: what happens when the machines are gone?

What happens when it's just me, her father, and this fragile, beautiful girl who had never known a world without monitors, oxygen, or nurses nearby? The pediatrician gently encouraged me to begin expressing more breast milk, even if it was just a few drops. "We can use it to feed the baby," he said.

One afternoon, the head nurse sat down beside me.

"She's doing incredibly well," she said with a proud smile.

"We're starting to prepare her for discharge. It may be a few weeks, but we want you to start thinking about transitioning."

I should've smiled, I should've rejoiced.

Instead, I panicked.

I had spent months in the NICU watching every beep, every number, every reaction. Here, she was protected. Here, we had a medical team. At home, it would be just us.

"I'm afraid," I confessed, my voice barely above a whisper.

"What if she stops breathing? What if she chokes? What if something goes wrong and I'm not fast enough?"

The nurse took my hand gently.

"Every NICU mother feels this," she said.

"You've been through war.

And now that the battle seems to be ending, your body doesn't know how to let down its guard.

But Hope has survived the impossible. And you've learned more in these months than most mothers do in years."

She paused, then added, "This fear is part of the process. But don't let it silence your joy. You're allowed to feel both, the fear and the miracle."

In the days that followed, the hospital began "rooming-in" preparations, a process where mothers spend nights with their preemie in a special room, managing their care under light supervision. The first night I roomed-in with Hope, I didn't sleep at all. I sat upright in bed, listening to every breath, every sigh, every hiccup.

One night, something shifted.

Hope stirred in her tiny bassinet, fussed a little, then fell asleep peacefully in my arms, her heartbeat steady, her chest rising calmly, no machines, no wires, just her.

It was the first time it truly hit me: she wasn't just surviving anymore.

She was living.

Weeks after Hope crossed the one-kilogram milestone, I began to notice something strange with my own body. My stomach still appeared full, almost like I was still pregnant.

I dismissed it at first, assuming it was part of the normal recovery process.

But I also began experiencing dizzy spells, especially when standing for more than a few minutes.

My body felt off, but my mind was so occupied with Hope's care that I pushed my symptoms aside.

Then one afternoon, while feeding Hope in the nursery, I felt a sudden sharp pain and an intense pressure in my lower abdomen.

Before I could react, I felt something burst inside me. I looked down, the floor was soaked in blood.

It was me. I was bleeding. Heavily.

Panic erupted in the nursery. Nurses quickly rushed me to an empty bed in the nearby maternity room.

The bleeding wouldn't stop. My doctor wasn't on-site, so she gave instructions to the nurses over the phone. My husband arrived in the middle of the chaos. After a quick discussion with the doctor, he was instructed to drive me to her private clinic for further examination.

I begged him not to take me away from the hospital.

My baby was there, I didn't want to be separated from her, especially not in this condition. But he was following medical advice, and there was no time to argue. With the help of the nurses, they placed me in the car. My lower body was soaked in blood. The car's back seat became a pool. Blood spilled through the doors onto the street as we drove through traffic.

When we arrived at the doctor's building, we were met with a new challenge, I had to be moved from the car into the clinic.

But I was bleeding so heavily, we couldn't risk walking through the streets exposed.

My husband quickly paid some nearby women street vendors to give us their lessos to wrap around me for privacy. Even so, as we entered the building, the lift floor became soaked with blood. Other passengers inside took one look at us, stepped out, and left us alone.

We reached the clinic. The doctor saw me and immediately went pale. She examined me quickly, then looked up with shock.

"There's a retained gauze in your uterus," she said, a foreign object mistakenly left inside me after delivery.

It had caused an infection and was now triggering massive hemorrhage. She immediately made arrangements to rush me back, to the same hospital where my baby lay fighting for life.

By the time we arrived, I was incredibly weak. I had lost so much blood that I could barely speak. As they wheeled me toward the theatre, I took off my wedding ring and gave it to my husband.

I looked him in the eyes and whispered, "Take care of our baby. Promise me, when I'm gone... you'll raise her well."

In my mind, this was the end. I had no strength left. I was slipping.

But by the grace of God, the surgery was successful.

The gauze was removed, and the arteries and veins in my uterus were sealed to stop the bleeding. For the first time in days, my body began to stabilize.

To our shock, and immense relief, I didn't need a blood transfusion after all. Instead, the doctor prescribed iron tablets and a strict, nutrient-packed diet to rebuild what I'd lost.

It was just enough to pull me back from the edge. I was alive, barely, but alive

I had survived hemorrhage twice. I had nearly lost my life, while trying to give life, and again while fighting to keep it. And yet, here I was. Still here. Still fighting. Still a mother.

And just across the corridor, so was Hope.

We were both still breathing.

A few weeks after my emergency surgery, I had regained enough strength to resume full-time care for Hope. Though my body still felt tender, emotionally I was more anchored than ever.

I had come close to death, twice, and each time, I came back to find my baby still fighting, still alive.

The bond between us had deepened. Every time I held her, I didn't just see a fragile preemie, I saw a survivor. A warrior. And I knew that, in many ways, her strength had pulled me through.

□ Chapter 7: When Darkness Whispers

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me...” Psalm 23:4 (NIV)

The following day, the pediatrician and gynecologist came to check on me. I was still physically weak and emotionally exhausted.

The pediatrician gently encouraged me to continue expressing more breast milk, even if it was just a few millimeters, drops. “This will help boost her immunity,” he said.

I didn’t understand how that was even possible. How could more milk come from breasts that had never breastfed? And even if I managed to express anything, my baby didn’t have lips or a developed mouth to suckle. She didn’t even look capable of swallowing. That’s when I was introduced to the idea of using a breast pump, something I had never heard of before. I was told to purchase one and begin trying.

Still overwhelmed, I asked the doctors the one question that haunted me every hour: “How is the baby doing?”

Their answer was carefully measured, but still devastating: “It’s too early to tell. We have to take it **one day at a time.**”

That phrase disturbed me deeply. **One day at a time.**

It sounded like they had no hope, like we were simply waiting for the inevitable.

I found myself living in constant dread of today while fearing the uncertainty of tomorrow.

I felt threatened by a future that refused to offer any assurance. Sensing my distress, my gynecologist sat by my bedside and read me these verses:

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:34: (NIV)

“Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death.” Ecclesiastes 8:7-8: (NIV)

I nodded politely, but the weight in my chest remained. I was trying to believe, to hope, but the reality in front of me felt heavier than faith.

For the next few days, Hope didn't improve. One morning, the doctor informed us that she had developed an infection and was being treated with antibiotics. Her weight had dropped to 800 grams. She looked even smaller, even more fragile. It felt like we were losing her.

Death felt closer than ever. I began having anxiety attacks. My heart would race, my thoughts would spiral. I kept asking myself, Why am I still here? Why keep fighting? Isn't it obvious she's going to die?

What made things worse was the growing silence around the other incubators. One by one, the babies in the beds next to Hope passed away.

First one. Then another. Each loss pierced me like a knife.

And then came the final blow, My mother-in-law arrived at the hospital to see the baby. With her many years of experience as a nurse and clinical officer, she spoke with the certainty of someone who had seen too much, perhaps too certain.

“There’s no way this baby will survive,” she declared to the staff, her voice sharp and unyielding. “You’re just wasting time and money.” Her words ignited an uproar.

The medical team, deeply disturbed by her outburst, had her escorted out by security and barred from returning. In time, I came to understand the weight of her own predicament.

By the time evening came, I was completely undone.

That night, in the solitude of my hospital room, I hit rock bottom.

I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t think clearly. And then a terrifying thought entered my mind, If you just push the tubes in her incubator a little, her lungs will collapse, and this will all be over. She’ll die quickly. No more suffering. No more uncertainty. You can go home. You can live a normal life.

I was horrified. The voice was persistent, persuasive.

But then, another voice interrupted, calm, strong, and unmistakably sacred:

“I am the Lord your God. Thou shalt not kill.”

A battle began inside me, between the voice of despair and the voice of God. One urged me to end the pain. The other called me to endure. My head felt like it was splitting open. I was shaking.

Just then, my husband walked into the room. I asked him to sit.

“I need to talk to you,” I said. “I want to kill the baby. I need your permission.”

He stared at me in shock. “Have you gone mad?” he shouted. “That’s my child! I will never agree to that!”

And just like that, he walked out, leaving me alone with the storm inside my soul.

In my desperation, I reached for the only prayer I could remember. I didn’t have the strength to formulate my own words, so I began repeating the Lord’s Prayer, over and over again:

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name...”

Over and over. Line by line. I clung to it like a rope in a storm.

And then something happened, something holy.

A calm began to settle over me. I couldn’t explain it. But where there had been torment, there was now peace.

Where there had been fear, there was now quiet.

I felt a presence with me, like I wasn't alone anymore.

And in that stillness, I made my choice.

I choose life.

Not because I was certain of the outcome. But because I knew life was sacred, even if fragile, even if short. And I would not be the one to end it.

From that moment on, something in me changed. I felt stronger. I felt watched over. And for the first time in weeks, I felt... accompanied.

□ Chapter 8: Learning to Mother in the Shadows

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you.” Isaiah 49:15 (NIV)

After choosing life, something shifted inside me. My circumstances hadn’t changed, my baby was still fighting for survival in a fragile glass box, but I had changed. I was no longer a prisoner of despair. A quiet strength was rising in me, one day at a time.

But the road ahead remained steep.

Each morning I woke up to the same clinical routine: check my vitals, pump some milk, visit the nursery. I was still unsure how much milk my body could produce, having never breastfed before, but I did what the doctors advised. I bought the pump and followed instructions faithfully. At first, the milk came in drops, barely enough to fill a syringe, but the nurses celebrated each drop as if it were gold.

“We can use this,” one nurse said, gently placing it into a feeding line. “Every drop counts.”

This simple phrase carried weight. It became my new mantra, every drop counts.

In the nursery, Hope lay under the glow of machines, oxygen, and warmth. Her skin was still translucent, her limbs impossibly tiny.

She looked less like a baby and more like a whisper of one, a fragile idea of life rather than the full form. But she was alive. And that was everything.

The medical team worked around the clock. Every beep, every alarm, every shuffle of footsteps sent my heart racing. One moment, I'd feel optimistic when she opened her tiny eyes or moved her fingers.

The next, I'd plummet into panic when a nurse rushed in to silence an urgent monitor.

The emotional pendulum was exhausting.

Even so, I began to understand something about motherhood that I'd never read in any book: it isn't always about cuddles and coos and warm blankets. Sometimes it's about presence. Just being there, by the incubator, by the pump, by the edge of hope.

That was how I mothered her.

I sang songs to her that she couldn't hear. I prayed aloud over her tiny body. I wrote her name in my notebook and said it over and over: Hope. Hope. Hope. I imagined her future. I whispered stories. I told her she was loved. I told her she was wanted. I told her she was not alone.

One day, a nurse approached me with a smile. "Would you like to hold her?"

I froze.

Hold her?

I hadn't even considered that possible. She was still less than 900 grams, and connected to countless tubes. But the nurse assured me it was safe, if I did it carefully.

They called it "kangaroo care", skin-to-skin holding. They placed her on my chest, her tiny frame covered in wires, monitors, and a small blanket.

She was so light I could barely feel her weight, and yet, in that moment, I felt the full gravity of motherhood settle onto me.

Her heartbeat pressed gently against mine. Her breath synced with my rhythm. And for the first time, I wasn't just a mother in waiting.

I was her mother, fully, deeply, presently.

I cried.

Not from fear, but from awe.

This child, whom doctors thought wouldn't survive an hour, had now lived a week. She had faced infections, weight loss, and multiple close calls. But she was still here.

So was I.

We were in this together.

□ Chapter 9: In the Shadow of the Unknown

“You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.” Psalm 32:7

Despite the painfully slow progression, something miraculous began to unfold before our eyes. Hope’s health gradually improved. Her skin thickened, her reflexes strengthened, and day by day, gram by gram, she began to grow.

There was no defining moment, no grand turning point, just a quiet series of small wins: passing urine, tolerating feeds, gaining a few grams, responding to light. But each step felt like a resurrection.

Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into two long, tender months.

One morning, as I sat beside her incubator, gently massaging her legs, the head nurse approached me with a wide smile.

“She’s ready.”

Those two words hung in the air like music. I blinked at her, unsure I’d heard correctly.

“Ready?” I whispered.

“Yes. Her vitals have stabilized. She’s feeding well. Gaining weight.

Her breathing has been unassisted for five days now.

She's met all the criteria.

You can finally take her home."

I was stunned. After all we had endured, the labor at 22 weeks, being told she was dead, the daily fights for her life, my own hemorrhages, the emergency surgery, we had made it to this moment. Discharge.

Hope was weighed one final time. 1.9 kilograms. Just under 2 kilos, still very small, but a giant in our eyes. The nurses removed the final sensors and monitors. I dressed her for the first time in a preemie outfit we'd bought weeks earlier, unsure if she'd ever get to wear it. It was still too big for her, but we wrapped her in soft blankets and held her close.

Before we left, the medical team gave us strict instructions. "No visitors for six months," they warned. "Her immune system is still too delicate. Even a minor infection could become life-threatening."

And so, we went home, not to celebration or welcome parties, but to isolation.

The doctor handed me her discharge file and said, "You've done beautifully. But remember, the journey doesn't end here. Follow-up appointments, and close monitoring will be part of your lives for a while."

I nodded, taking in every word. But in that moment, all I could think was: We get to go home.

Together. The nurses gathered around to say goodbye. Some were in tears.

They had seen Hope from her very first breath. they had cheered her on through every crisis, every gram gained, every silent prayer. One nurse placed a small sticker on her blanket that read, NICU Graduate.

Walking out of that hospital with Hope in my arms felt surreal. We had arrived months earlier in silence, in fear, in despair. Now we were leaving in awe, with joy, with gratitude, and with a little girl who had rewritten every rule about survival.

Hope had lived up to her name.

And I had learned that sometimes, the miracle isn't in what we avoid, but in what we endure and overcome.

□ Chapter 10: No Visitors, Just Faith & Isolation for survival

At home we designated our bedroom as the sanctuary. A protected zone. For six months, no one, not friends, not extended family, not even the curious or well-meaning, would set foot inside. Only my husband had access to the room. Hope never left it. I only stepped out to quickly fetch food or sterilize feeding supplies. Aside from the routine hospital checkups, we didn't go outside.

We lived in a kind of protective exile, a bubble that felt both sacred and stifling. The world continued outside our four walls, but for us, life stood still.

Hope didn't breastfeed. Her mouth was still too underdeveloped, her reflexes too weak. But she could take expressed milk through a syringe or bottle. Her feeding schedule was strict: every two hours, she needed 15 milliliters of breast milk. The amount would gradually increase, but the frequency remained relentless.

That meant I was expressing breast milk around the clock, day and night. The pump became my companion. I would set alarms, measure ounces, sterilize containers, and keep detailed feeding logs.

I rarely slept more than an hour or two at a time.

I was exhausted, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Yet strangely, I wasn't broken.

In the midst of that long confinement, I discovered an unexplainable inner peace.

Not from comfort or convenience, but from purpose. Hope was alive. I was keeping her alive. That was enough.

There were no words for the kind of solitude I experienced. No visitors. No social life. No distractions. Just me, a pump, my baby, and God.

Some nights I would sit in the darkness holding her, listening to her soft breathing, and whisper, “You are worth it.” And I meant it. Every single time.

In that hidden season, I learned the sacred rhythm of serving in secret, of giving without applause, sacrificing without recognition, loving without limit.

It was the wilderness, but it was also holy ground.

□ Chapter 11: When the World Walked Out-Faith Stepped In

While at home with my fragile newborn, I sent a leave extension request to my employer, hoping they would understand the gravity of my situation and grant me an additional four months on top of the standard two-month maternity leave. Weeks passed with no response. When I finally called the HR manager, she curtly informed me that, since I hadn't reported back to work, my leave had already begun counting from my first day of absence. I was expected back in two weeks.

Still, she added vaguely, she would consult and get back to me.

A week later, a letter arrived. It wasn't approval. It wasn't compassion. It was a termination letter.

When I called to ask for clarity, I was told, "We can't afford to keep someone on payroll who isn't working. We've already replaced you." No empathy. No recognition of the storm I was weathering.

I felt discarded, abandoned at my most vulnerable moment, not just emotionally but financially.

But after the tears, I breathed deeply and reminded myself of the choice I had already made, I had chosen life. And with that,

I resolved to give my full attention to caring for Hope, believing with every fiber of my being that she would one day grow up to thrive, just like any other child.

□ Chapter 12: A New Name for the Journey

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Romans 5:3–4 (NIV)

Three and a half months later, on what would have been Hope’s original due date, she weighed 3.2 kilograms. She was plump, radiant, and finally looked like other babies her age, something I had once only dreamed of.

Her transformation amazed even the doctors. One of them, eyes wide with disbelief, chuckled and said, “Honestly, this is the most successful premature baby development I’ve ever seen. There must be supernatural powers at work in this little one.” That moment filled me with pride, not just as her mother, but as a survivor who had walked the valley of death and come out the other side.

A religious friend had once whispered a concern that had haunted me during the darkest days, that if an unbaptized baby dies, she might not go to heaven because of the original sin of Adam and Eve. Whether theological or not, I didn’t want to take that risk. I needed peace, and I needed Hope covered by grace. I felt it was time to do something deeply spiritual. With my husband and her god mother, we took her for baptism at the Church, she was given a new name **Cindy**, and now she became **Cindy**.

Cindy’s health was now remarkably stable. No major infections. No emergency hospital visits.

It felt like we had crossed a dangerous bridge and could finally exhale. With that relief, our focus slowly shifted from survival to development.

That's when the next layer of the journey began to unfold.

Five months after discharge, Cindy still couldn't hold her head up properly. At twelve months, she hadn't started sitting on her own. And when she finally did, she wasn't curious or playful. She just stayed in the exact position we placed her in, staring blankly, seemingly uninterested in the world around her.

Still, I wasn't alarmed. After all, she had come into this world too soon. Surely, she just needed a little more time.

But then came another red flag. At eighteen months, she still hadn't crawled. When she finally did, she crawled backwards. That triggered something in me, a kind of holy discomfort. I called my mother, hoping for reassurance, but she was careful with her words. "My daughter," she said gently, "by now, your baby should be walking and starting to talk."

Her words struck me deeply. I felt a wave of anxiety, then determination. I needed clarity.

I decided to seek a second opinion, this time at the pediatric neurology clinic at the National Hospital. I walked in with a baby who looked fine to the world, but something deep inside told me not all was well.

After a thorough assessment, the pediatrician gave me the diagnosis: Mild Cerebral Palsy.

The words rang in my ears like a siren. Mild Cerebral palsy?
What did that even mean?

The doctor explained that it was a neurological condition that affected motor development and muscle control.

“You need to start physiotherapy immediately,” he said. “Her motor skills can improve with consistent therapy.”

I left that room numb. My first instinct was to call my husband. He was stunned. Silent. In disbelief. I could feel his heart sinking even through the phone.

The next morning, I called Cindy’s longtime neonatologist-pediatrician, the one who had been with us from her earliest fragile days. I was furious. “Why didn’t you tell us?” I demanded. “Why did you hide this from us?”

He listened quietly, then replied with unusual calm: “I don’t believe in branding children with medical conditions too early. From my experience, once parents hear labels, many give up hope and stop trying. But your daughter, she’s different. She’s a fighter. From what I’ve observed, She will live a reasonably normal life. But the journey will be... painfully slow.”

His words weren’t comforting. But they were honest. And in that moment, I began to realize: this was a new chapter in the story, a different kind of battle. One not for her life, but for her potential.

We had already beaten the odds once. Could we do it again?

I didn’t have all the answers. But I had faith. And I had Hope.

□ Chapter 13: "Between Therapy and Prayer"

We plunged headfirst into a rigorous therapy schedule, three days a week at the hospital and two days with therapists who came to our home. The remaining two days were filled with assigned activities to prevent any regression. Every effort, every movement was aimed at developing Hope's motor skills and giving her a chance to thrive.

Daily full-body massages became our sacred ritual. I would gently work her tiny fingers, stretch her legs, and rotate her joints, mimicking the motions of kicking and grasping, as if coaxing her body to remember what it was made for. We were also encouraged to try swimming and high swings to address her gravitational fear, a condition that made her dread the sensation of standing. According to the therapists, the fear rooted her to the ground, making her resist upright positions.

But this was not an easy path.

Cindy often cried during therapy, especially when her legs were stretched or pressed. Some sessions required us to strap her in a standing position against a pole for nearly an hour, an exercise meant to awaken her leg muscles and bones, to teach her body to carry its own weight. "Any part of the body not used begins to wither," the therapist would say. I held on to those words like a mission.

Later, her doctor ordered an X-ray to assess the bone mass and strength of her legs.

The images revealed a hard truth, her bones were still too thin to support her standing. “She must stand,” the doctor insisted. “Only by standing will her bones develop.”

We clung to every instruction. If I missed even one scheduled activity, I was flooded with guilt, questioning if I’d let her down. But I kept going, because giving up was never an option.

At every physiotherapy and occupational therapy session, one thing became clear, this was a space filled almost entirely with mothers and their children. The sight of a man was rare. My husband stood out like a lighthouse in a storm. He often came with us, and at times, even took Cindy to therapy sessions alone. One day, one of the therapists looked at him and said with a half-smile, “It’s strange to see you here. Most men never come. This journey is often left entirely to the mothers.”

Curious and somewhat burdened, I began asking other women why this was the norm. Their answers broke my heart. Many of them had been abandoned the moment their child was diagnosed with a disability. According to certain traditional beliefs, having a child with special needs was seen as a curse or a bad omen. Some spoke in hushed tones about babies who had been discarded, even killed. Others said they had been divorced and left to carry the weight alone. I was stunned, and deeply grateful. My heart swelled with thanksgiving that God had given me a husband who stood by me and by our daughter without wavering.

Still, even in our village, whispers surrounded us.

I overheard murmurs from some relatives and neighbors, suggesting that my baby's condition was punishment for delaying childbirth or using contraceptives.

In their eyes, my choice to pursue education and a career before marriage defied tradition. Most girls in our village had their first child by eighteen. I was the only one who had waited until after marriage and had dared to dream beyond the boundaries of our culture. In their view, such defiance came with a price.

But I knew better. God does not curse obedience. And no child, no matter how fragile is a punishment.

When Cindy turned Three years of tireless work, we were referred to a neurologist who recommended a brain MRI. On the day of the scan, Cindy and I entered the anesthetist's room with cautious hope. She was given the required sedation, but to everyone's surprise, she refused to fall asleep.

Minutes turned into an hour. The medical team returned and gently told me, "We've given her the maximum dose allowed. We can't proceed. She needs to be completely still, and she just won't sleep."

We returned home with the MRI undone. That night, I sat in silence, wrestling with frustration and surrender. But as I looked at her peaceful face, I whispered a prayer: "Lord, where medicine pauses, let Your healing begin." I chose to trust that God, who had brought us this far, was not finished with her story yet.

□ Chapter 14: When Miracles Take Small Steps

Five years had passed. My daughter was still in diapers. She still hadn't walked on her own. But I held tightly to hope, not the vague kind, but the gritty, persistent belief that she would eventually get there.

We committed ourselves fully to the guidance of the therapists. Three days a week, we were in the hospital's physiotherapy rooms. On the other three days, the therapist came to our home. It was an extremely demanding routine, physically, emotionally, and financially. But we did not waver.

Though progress was slow, I was unwavering in my faith. I clung to the promise found in **Matthew 18:6**:

"If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

To me, this verse wasn't just about judgment; it was a vow, that God fiercely protects His little ones. And I believed, with all my heart, that God was watching over mine.

One day, I felt gently led to organise a prayer mass at our home

The priest arrived with members of the church, and together with our family and close friends, we turned our home into holy ground. Room by room, we anointed the walls, sang hymns that cracked through the silence, and cried out to heaven with every ounce of faith we had.

The priest dedicated our house, lifted heartfelt prayers and cried out to heaven together, covering my daughter in grace, and surrounding our home with a sense of sacred peace.

Exactly one week later, something extraordinary happened.

"During one of our regular physiotherapy sessions at home, outside in the compound, seated on a mat, Cindy suddenly relieved herself, and then, as if propelled by surprise, stood up and took five unassisted steps."

Five. Glorious. Steps.

We froze in shock. The therapist and I stared at each other, then at her stunned, overwhelmed with joy. I let out a scream and burst into tears. For so long, we had only dreamed of this moment. Now it was real.

That night, we celebrated quietly. Not with balloons or parties but with awe. Because we knew we had just witnessed a miracle.

Over the next two weeks, we practiced walking daily. Each step grew more stable, her confidence rising. Eventually, we realized she could now walk unaided. It wasn't perfect, but it was possible and that was everything.

The following month, we enrolled her in a nearby kindergarten and preprimary school that had just opened.

It was a half-day program, but even that felt monumental. My daughter was going to school like other children.

She had a backpack. She wore a uniform. She was part of something bigger than therapy and hospital walls.

To support her development further, we later added speech therapy three afternoons a week. Communication was still a struggle, but just like with her walking, we believed that with time, she would find her voice.

Each small milestone. A word attempt, a new facial expression, a clearer sound, was celebrated like a graduation.

We had learned not to compare her to others. We had learned to see the miracle in progress, not perfection.

And through it all, that same quiet, mysterious peace that had filled our home since the day I chose life, it never left.

□ Chapter 15: "Another Mountain to Climb"

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you...” Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)

Just when we had begun to adjust to a new rhythm, walking, school, therapy, and growing faith, another challenge emerged.

Cindy developed a persistent ear infection. At first, it didn't seem unusual, just a bit of discomfort and fever. But as weeks passed, it worsened. After several consultations and tests, we were told that she had developed fluid in her inner ears, a condition that was interfering with her ability to hear clearly.

The doctors recommended surgery to drain the fluid and prevent long-term hearing damage. I was filled with anxiety, not because the procedure was high-risk, but because Cindy had already endured so much. Another theatre, another medical intervention, I worried how much her little body could take.

But by the grace of God, the surgery was successful.

In the weeks that followed, we noticed changes. She could now respond better to sounds and voices.

But the delay in treatment had already affected her speech development. Though she could hear clearly, her speech remained limited.

At first, this was frustrating. We hoped that hearing clearly would automatically lead to improved communication.

But once again, Cindy reminded us that her journey would always follow a different timeline.

She didn't speak much, but the words she did use mattered. She had learned to communicate with clarity and intention. One word could hold an entire meaning. When she said "toilet," it was clear what she meant. If she said "water," we knew she was thirsty. If she reached out, it was for love or comfort.

More importantly, she understood everything. Anyone who spent time with her quickly learned how to interpret her expressions, gestures, and simple words. She had her own language, shaped by resilience, crafted through determination.

Despite the speech delays, her comprehension was advanced, and her spirit remained unbreakable. We continued speech therapy, and slowly but surely, her vocabulary began to grow.

Three years later, at just nine years old, Cindy graduated from her primary school. It was a day filled with emotion, not just because of the academic milestone, but because of the path we had walked to get there.

From the delivery room where she was declared dead, to this bright, joyful child in a graduation gown, smiling proudly, it felt like the world had come full circle. She still couldn't form full sentences, but she beamed with confidence. And in that smile, we heard everything we ever needed to know.

□ Chapter 16: Thriving Against All Odds: From Milestones to Miracles

After Cindy's graduation from Kindergarten & pre-primary, we took a leap of faith and enrolled her at a British Curriculum School, a bold step into unfamiliar waters. This school had a specialized unit designed for children with learning differences, offering an environment rich in compassion, tailored instruction, and the belief that every child could thrive when met with patience and love.

Around the same time, I felt the stirring to return to the workforce. I applied for a job listed in the newspaper, a position with an international airline. By God's grace, I was not only hired but offered a senior role with better pay and greater stability than my previous employer, who had abandoned me in my moment of deepest need. God had redeemed what was lost and opened a door no man could shut.

Cindy's progress at the British Academy was nothing short of miraculous. She was like a tree planted by streams of water, *"which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither."* *Psalms 1:3 (IIV)*. Slowly but steadily, she began to read and write, stringing letters into words, solving simple arithmetic problems with growing confidence and joy. Each small victory was a testament to grace, resilience, and relentless prayer.

But as is often the case in life, 5 years just when things seemed stable, a change came.

Her beloved class teacher, who had become like a second mother, left the school. Cindy, who had bonded deeply with her, was heartbroken.

The disruption affected her emotionally, and we saw the need to find a more secure and consistent learning environment.

That's when God led us to a Catholic School, home to a renowned special needs unit known for its kindness and understanding. It turned out to be exactly what Cindy needed. She settled in beautifully and completed her foundational education there with determination and grace.

Upon graduation, we transitioned her to a Senior School which has a Vocational stream where she began the next phase of her journey, a mix of academic and vocational training tailored for young adults with special needs. There, she continued to grow in confidence and capability, learning practical life skills, taking ownership of her daily routine, managing tasks, and engaging in meaningful work.

Today, 27 years later, Cindy stands as a testimony of quiet strength and divine providence. She is largely independent, filled with dignity, joy, and purpose. She's not just surviving, she's thriving.

Looking back over this journey, from that tiny, frail baby in the NICU to the confident young woman she is now, I can say this with certainty: "Indeed, with God, all things are possible."

Cindy's life is living proof.

□ Chapter 17: Love Heals

Raising Cindy with love and patience changed everything. It wasn't just about caring for her physical needs, it was about choosing love every single day, even in moments of pain, fear, or uncertainty. This love became the atmosphere in which her healing and development took root and flourished.

Loving and being loved is the core of who we are. When we feel unloved, we shrink inside. We become smaller than the fullness of who we were created to be. But love, true, sacrificial, unconditional love, brings expansion. It breathes life into the soul. It is not magical or instantaneous. It is not superficial. Love heals from the inside out.

Everything in our lives flows from within us: our thoughts, our emotions, our intentions, and our decisions. And it is the inner person, the soul that often suffers the deepest wounds. When this part of us is injured, everything else becomes unbalanced. But love has the power to restore that inner place.

Love doesn't just heal our feelings. It realigns the way our heart, mind, and will are meant to work together. It restores the design.

We were created in love and for love.

Love is not just a feeling, it is spirit, it is energy, it is life.

God is Love. And being disconnected from Love is like being disconnected from life itself.

This Is How Love Heals

Connect: Invite God into our pain. We reach out, and He answers. His presence brings comfort, and He sends people, divine connections, to walk with us.

Validation: God validates our pain. He acknowledges it. And through His love, He restores our worth, reminding us of how deeply valued and seen we are.

Light: In our confusion, He shows us what is true. He clears away the lies, gives us wisdom, and reveals a new way of seeing.

Truth: Through His Word and His Spirit, truth anchors us. It becomes a compass in the storm.

Process: Healing is not rushed. It unfolds step by step. Little by little. Grace upon grace. Patience as a companion.

Faith: Healing grows as we cooperate with God. When we dare to believe, we give His love room to work.

By Harnessing the Power of This Love

Embracing the Love that heals is as simple as asking. There is no shame in needing help. Every one of us will, at some point, come to a point where we can no longer go on alone. And that is where God's love begins to shine the brightest.

I can't tell you how long your healing journey will take, no two paths are the same.

But I can tell you this with certainty:

God is committed to loving you into wholeness.

Jesus is the proof of that. His love is not distant or abstract. ***It is personal. Active. Close.***

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

*And the first step is simply this: **Say yes to Love.***

□ **Chapter 18: The Silent Screams and the Power of Belief**

The trauma of delivering a child under such fragile and uncertain conditions is deeply personal. It wounds us in places no one else can see, places where identity, self-worth, and hope reside.

It shakes our foundation and forces us to question our value, our strength, and sometimes, even our faith.

But here's the truth:

Trauma does not disappear just because we ignore it.

It lingers. It festers. And it screams, silently, in the corridors of our hearts.

Only we can hear it. And only when we acknowledge it, when we validate that pain, then healing begins.

Suffering and trauma live inside of us, silently screaming, until they're healed by the Source of all Love.

And that source is God.

God is Love.

Anchored in Belief

Throughout this journey, I chose to believe, even when hope seemed foolish.

I truly believed that my daughter would grow up to live a full, meaningful life.

We gave everything we had: emotionally, physically, financially, and spiritually.

We clung to the advice of her physiotherapist, occupational therapist, and speech therapist. Our lives revolved around her healing and development, not out of obligation, but out of love.

We made a choice: To carry her into the world as she was, with confidence and dignity.

Whether it was shopping, attending church, or going on family outings, Cindy was always with us. We did not hide her. We didn't apologize for her existence.

Even when strangers gave us that look, the "something is wrong with that child" look, we stood our ground.

Because we believed not only in her potential, but also in society's need to grow.

If we could accept Cindy exactly as she was, then the world could learn to do the same.

And it worked.

Over time, we began to notice remarkable changes in her.

She started expressing emotions.

She became more confident, made decisions, and showed a growing sense of independence.

She began to believe in herself, because we believed in her first.

The Power of Persistence

Every evening, after dinner, we had a routine.

I would sit beside her bed, read her a story, and then help her practice writing.

Our first goal was simple: learning to write her name, "Cindy."

It took us three full months to master the letter "C". But I didn't give up, and neither did she.

We repeated the letters every day. Little by little, progress came.

By the end of twelve months, she could write her entire name. And this was no small feat.

I had been told that a child with cerebral palsy would never be able to write, that their fine motor skills would be too limited. But we refused to be bound by that.

With this breakthrough, I felt a deep sense of accomplishment, not just for her, but for all the unseen battles we had fought together.

I pushed further.

She went on to write her second name.

Then I taught her how to write a paragraph about herself, her name, her parents' names, and her school.

Why?

Because I wanted her to have a voice, even if her speech was not clear, I wanted her to have a way to communicate, especially in case she ever got lost.

Love in Action

This was love in its truest form:

Not just words, not just emotions, but action.

Love that shows up every single day.

Love that writes letters.

Love that teaches, guides, believes, and never gives up.

Today, as I look back, I see a journey that was never easy, but always sacred.

And through it all, I have come to know this:

Healing comes not in a rush, but in steady footsteps of love.
Love that validates. Love that believes. Love that persists.
And above all, Love that comes from God, the Source of all healing.

Because miracles aren't always sudden.
Sometimes, they grow slowly, one breath, one step, one heartbeat at a time.

□ Chapter 19: Full Circle – A Mother’s Reflection

Looking back, it’s hard to believe how far we’ve come. From the sterile, humming NICU to the sound of Cindy’s footsteps in our home, this journey has stretched my heart in ways I never imagined.

I have lived through fear, grief, helplessness, and miracles. I have seen the edge of life and felt the hand of God pulling us back. Cindy was born too soon, but Loved Forever. She was covered in grace from her first fragile breath.

I am no longer the woman who once feared the NICU monitors or questioned if I could survive another day. I am stronger now, not because I had all the answers, but because I walked hand in hand with Love through every question.

To every parent reading this, especially those holding hope in one hand and fear in the other, know this:

You are not alone.

The road may be long, and the milestones may come slowly, but they will come.

You are allowed to grieve what you lost, while still celebrating what you gained.

You are allowed to feel tired and faithful at the same time.

And most importantly, you are enough.

My daughter Cindy didn’t just grow, she grew me.

She didn’t just survive, she taught us all how to live.

If this story has touched you, I hope it leaves you with the courage to love fiercely, to believe stubbornly, and to keep showing up — even when the outcome is unclear.

We came full circle. And if we did, so can you.

A Prayer for the Parent Holding On

"O God",

Thank you for the gift of life, even when it arrives too early or unfolds differently than we expected.

For every parent holding a fragile hope, grant courage.

For every caregiver walking through hospitals, therapies, or diagnoses, grant strength.

For the days when fear is louder than faith, speak peace into our hearts.

Remind us that no journey is too broken for healing, and no story too early for grace.

May your love cover our children, every breath, every step, every delay, every miracle.

And may we always remember, You always walk this journey with us.

Amen.

A Letter to You, Reader and Fellow Warrior

If you've made it to this final page, thank you, not just for reading our story, but for honoring your own.

Whether you're a parent, grandparent, caregiver, teacher, or someone trying to understand this world of prematurity and special needs, know this:

You matter. Your presence matters. Your love changes things.

This book was born out of pain, but it is offered in love. My hope is that it reminds you to hold on to God, to hope, and to your child, even when it's hard.

And if you've ever whispered, "Why me?" I pray this story answers, "Because you were chosen for something sacred."

Stay faithful. Stay tender. And always, always choose love.

Scripture for the Road Ahead

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

1 Peter 5:10 (ESV)

With love and grace,

Sally Mbai

Author of *Born Too Soon, Loved Forever:*
A Story of Faith, Trauma and Triumph

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About the Author

Sally Mbai is a Veteran Airline Professional and Founder President of CIDALI International, a Travel & Leisure Management Company. She is also a passionate writer, an inspiring speaker, and a devoted mother to a miracle child, born at just 22 weeks, as well as her other children, all while embracing many other remarkable roles.

Drawing from her personal journey, Sally advocates fiercely for parents raising children with special needs and developmental challenges. She champions love, faith, and unwavering parental dedication as vital foundations for every child's success, no matter the odds.