

## **Chapter One: Roots of Resilience**

Navigating womanhood is no easy thing, especially when the world insists on calling you “tough.” But if I’ve grown into that label, it’s because of the quirky, colorful, and sometimes comical way I was raised. Growing up in a standard Kenyan family in the early ’80s, and as the last born in a family of four, my story was written in the middle of laughter, strict rules, mischief, and plenty of life lessons. I was born into a home where books were almost sacred, discipline was non-negotiable, and love was expressed not just in words, but in the quiet, bold actions of my parents.

My Dad, a firm believer in empowering his children regardless of gender, defied the odds of male chauvinism long before it became a public conversation. At a time when the world insisted women belonged in the kitchen, silent and serving, he chose a different path. He empowered his wife to rise, to thrive, and to lead. One of his boldest acts of defiance was affirming me and my sister into an attire that was completely forbidden for girls in the village, trousers. Yes, in the ’80s, a girl wearing trousers was practically a scandal, an unspoken rebellion against cultural norms. But my dad not only approved, he financed it! Looking back, I realize that in those simple gestures, he was tearing down barriers and teaching me that my worth was not tied to outdated traditions.

For him, my mum was not just his wife, but the cornerstone of our family’s empowerment. His actions spoke louder than words: he supported her career in the

chains of education, ensuring she rose as he also rose to the top ranks of the country's education system. To ease her mobility in the village, he gifted her a car, a rarity at the time. With that one decision, he gave her wings to fly. My dad carried himself with the dignity of a man who understood the power of learning, the kind who had seen firsthand how far education could take you. And in empowering his wife and children, he passed that vision to us like an inheritance more valuable than land or wealth.

My Mum, with the doors of empowerment opened for her, had her own legendary approach. She was an academician, a primary school head teacher with a sharp eye for detail and a heart that believed education could alter the course of destiny. Having been gifted a car, she became the very first woman in our village in the early '80s to drive. People were so impressed they nicknamed her *"Nyina wa Shiku wa VK"* after her car's license plate. Imagine being so iconic that your car's number plate became part of your identity!

But her road to becoming the village's "first lady driver" was not without comic drama. Mum trained by literally hitting every fence pole along the road. Each trip was a mix of screeching brakes, startled chickens, and neighbors running out to watch the spectacle. Yet she never gave up. Every dent on the fence was a badge of resilience. And when she finally mastered the art of driving, it was as though the whole village had also graduated with her. From then on, she drove with a confidence that turned heads and stirred conversations—

a moving testimony that no barrier was too high for a determined woman.

She, too, believed in firm discipline, oh! And her hands were famous. They could cradle you in comfort one moment, and the next, they would squeeze your fleshy laps with a grip that made you sit upright in an instant. That “pinch of correction” was her silent lecture: sharp, unforgettable, and needing no follow-up explanation. Combined with my dad’s unyielding cane, I quickly learned that actions had consequences. Yet looking back now, I realize their discipline and dedication were not simply harshness—they were building blocks, shaping me for the future. Living up to the scripture: *“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” (Proverbs 13:24, NKJV)*

Together, my parents wove academics into the golden thread that held our household together. Truly, they were *“training me up in the way I should go” (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV)*, laying a foundation that still speaks loudly in my life today.

Growing up as the last-born in a family of four came with its own brand of drama, laughter, and endless life lessons. I was the family’s little project, the one everyone felt entitled to guide, tease, or “train” in their own way. My elder brother quickly crowned himself my official lookout officer. He had a knack for appearing at the very moment I tried to sneak a mango from the kitchen or laugh too loudly. To him, it was all part of keeping me “on the straight path.” Then there was my sister, the only girl in the family besides me, and my

immediate elder. She was quick to remind me that she ranked above me in both age and authority, and she didn't let me forget it! If my brother was the police, my sister was the judge, ensuring I "towed the line" whenever my tough-headedness tried to rise.

Meanwhile, my other brother took a completely different approach; he was more indifferent to the drama, perhaps because we shared a creative mind. While the others enforced the rules, he was busy sketching blueprints in his imagination. No wonder, in my little adventures, he would often come in handy, either as my quiet ally or as the one who truly understood the thrill of a wild idea and would help me craft it.

Looking back, I see how each of them shaped me: one enforced discipline, one demanded respect, and one quietly fueled my creativity. Together, they toughened me up, kept me in check, and, without knowing it, helped me discover the stubborn yet imaginative spirit that would carry me through life, living to the scripture: *"As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."* (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV)

## **Chapter Two: The World Beyond the Walls**

School wasn't exactly smooth sailing for me. Being the youngest in almost every class, I looked like I had accidentally wandered in from the baby section. My classmates, especially in 7th and 8th grade, were taller, louder, and far more "grown-up." Whenever I joined their conversations, they would suddenly pause and switch topics, as though they had to protect my "innocent little ears." When Mum didn't give me a ride home, I learnt to trail behind my classmates rather than walk with them, pretending not to notice the gap. To cope, I often found easier friendships with the lower graders, where my small physique fit right in.

Being the headteacher's child didn't help either. To the teachers, I was expected to be a model student. To the students, I was a suspected spy. Each time a classroom secret somehow reached the headteacher, I could almost feel the daggers in their angry whispers, with my name the unspoken conclusion. So, I drifted into solitude. But loneliness has its strange gifts. While others whispered their secrets, I began to create my own worlds: stories, adventures, and games that filled the silence and made me forget what I was missing. My imagination became my closest friend, and in it, I discovered a freedom that no suspicion or whisper could take away.

At home, you were either reading or reading. There wasn't really a third option. Books weren't just encouraged; they were woven into the fabric of our daily routine. My parents set up strict academic timetables for us, complete with neat columns for subjects, revision,