

MY SCAR, MY ROAD



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• Gertrude Nonzwakazi Sgwentu and Ali Michael •

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Chapter 1

The culture of poverty: a farm childhood

1

What makes me to don't have access about my life is that in a black tradition, I don't know about white, to show a respect to a person, you don't ask questions. You're not allowed to ask questions to your mother, your father or the elder people. So that culture cut you down. If you want to ask, you must know you have crossed the borders of that culture and you don't mind. My mother is using that culture not to be able to talk to me. And my aunt.

2

One of the Brown sons had this car, I think it was a Datsun, that had a strong engine and make a huge noise. It was a yellow-orange bright color with black stripes. When that car comes, it shows how fundamental the slavery can be in any child. You stop whatever you do as a child to go and praise this car. You just cannot not go and praise that car, you just cannot. That guy will start the car and I think he pressed the petrol and it goes like, "Whaa, whaa, drrruu, drrru."

We called that car the ZulwanaBrown. I remember they used to say, "I wonder how did those children get to name this car?" I want us to translate this ZulwanaBrown in a way that everybody will understand. Zulu means heaven. Then the Brown family. So it's like we were in heaven and that car was something in that heaven. I don't understand how we as children came to name that car, because it's just a car. So totally in our subconscious, we knew the Browns are Gods. We're somehow sinners that ended up being slaves to them.

You rrrun the fastest that you can ever see, just to see that car leaving the gate. And we say, "ZULwana, ZULwanaBrown. ZULwana, ZULwanaBrown." You run, you go, you take off your clothes, you wave your clothes in the air! We'll be holding on this wire fence and climbing to see and say, "ZULwana, ZULwanaBrown," and there it comes! Each and every of us has got praises for this car, it's the most beautiful praise you can ever give a thing that doesn't belong to you. When it gets to the

national road, out of the long Brown driveway, we say, "ZULwanaBrown. There it goes. Look at it." When it's gone, you just can't wait for that car to come back again. We will be playing till late to wait for the car comes back. And then when it comes, we can hear it somewhere when it starts to make that noise, we run to go and praise that car. That guy, I think he was on his 20s, he loved it too. He knew he has to do it for us, he has to keep on pressing the petrol, that it can make that "Whaa, whaa."

When that guy sold that car, we felt like we were dying, we were so mad at him. It was a connection that we had with him. And it get us as a children in the farm to be united. In the farm, there's so much fights, there's so much jealousy over who the baas greeted. We'll fight about who he looked at - and even the parents will be involved in this jealousy. But when we run for this car, we're so excited, we're all so united, we want to praise it, we see this god. It's amazing why we gave it ZulwanaBrown. How did we make a relation of the car and heaven?

3

The Brown family will walk with their horses around the field at the side of the house; it was their favorite place. I used to really like this. We will just stand as a group of children watching them. I think in each and every of us we wishing, we hope we can be them. I used to say, "One day I'm going to own a horse and ride." The Browns will play with their children and jump and sometimes, they look at you. If you see the white children, you just want to be seen, you push each other that you must be in front, to be seen. You must greet, "Molo, Baasie," "Morning, Baas," or "Afternoon, Baas." You know, if it were me with a horse, I would just call one of these children and say, "Come, I'll show you how to do it." No, not them. They just look at you. I never rode a horse, even today, but I'm still working on it.

Being white meant luxury to us, it meant money and meant power. It meant you have servants, it meant beauty, it meant long hair. It meant you can have a horse. You don't even do anything to care for that horse, other people does it for you. And cars, it meant cars. Everything around wealth is around white people. That is the problem today in South Africa. We growing up with that idea, that a white person

got all, got everything. It's hard to look at a white person and come to the point of thinking, "They just like me, they got feelings like me." Because we are growing up with the parents that believed that other way so deep, so deep.

4

She knew everything. That was Mrs. Brown. She was a white woman, but she could speak Xhosa purely. She helped give me the name Gertrude and each and every child that was born on that farm, she would record things for them. Nobody knew about date of birth. Nobody knew about birth certificate. A child must be written down the information - what time are you born. She's the one who knew. Because nobody was educated enough to know that.

When I got to school, I could speak English through Mrs. Brown. She will teach me English. She will always laugh when I talk, but she will say, "You have to speak." Sometimes I'm angry, I don't want to speak English because I'm not looking at the future. I don't know anything. Why is this language? And she said with a tough voice, "You have to speak English, Gertrude, because it's good for you. It's gonna be good for your future."

All the children from the farms around – they all go to Lion Hill School. There's no other school. It was built by the neighbor of that farm and then the farmers will have a say on it. In the rural areas, these farmer guys are the control. Besides the big apartheid, it was that small control of one human being. All the children go to that school. I come from this control. You walk to that school, and I tell you, you got beaten if you late. You must be at school at 8 o'clock or you going to have a cane. You go barefoot and this is a rough road.

5

We had a mud house on the Brown farm, at the back of the property so you can't see it from the house. That house still holds nightmares for me in my life. It's like a wind that takes me there in my dreams, like I'm flying there.

Funny enough, it's very hard to recall anything nice that happened in that house. I never dreamed of anything nice there. Maybe eating jam once a year on Christmas. That was nice. And screaming early in the morning, "Happy Christmas!"

What else? There's a thing that I can remember, it makes me to love my granddad a lot. He was quite old at the time, and he was supporting about maybe twelve people

in the house. He used to come with a big mealie-meal bag from the Browns once a month. And I tell you, Ali, if that finish, it finish. Then he has to buy. So, which means, he was always working, he was always in debt.

When I think I was a part of a guy that was doing that, it makes me to love him very much and say he did his best. That huge mealie meal made me, made that person that is sitting next to you today. And I can never forget that. I don't know if I can say it makes me happy or it makes me sad or it makes me strong or it gives me more courage. But it must never happen again.

6

My Aunt Harriet was not really in favor of Mrs. Brown wanting to help me to buy a uniform and to get in school. She thought she should have done it for her daughter, Pumeza. Pumeza was my age, but she wasn't as good on school as me. My Aunt would say, "It's funny that Mrs. Brown want you to speak English with her." I didn't think it was funny. I continue to speak English with her. I did not learn English through school.

Harriet used to beat me. I was like a nanny to her children. Just as she's working for Mr. Brown, I was working for her. I used to want to be Harriet's daughter like anything. She was the only mother around and I wanted to belong somewhere. I think the worst thing is that she would not allow me to go and find my father. She was good - she clothed me, she fed me, and she will wash me. She tried her way to care for me. But she didn't tell me anything around my mother or my father. So I never knew why was this situation, why didn't I have a family?

Ultimately my Aunt was raising me with the mindset of I will get married and then they will have lobola. That was always a motive. It was a cultural thing. You raise a child, a girl, and you know that girl is going to get married and then you going to be paid back all the money that you have used. So that was what's happening.

I repeated grade six three times because the school had no other grades after that. The teachers said I must keep on, I must do grade six till I can go to another school, otherwise my mind is going to rust.

7

As a girl on the farm, you wake up about half past five. Who wakes you up is the chickens. You know the first chickens start about half past 4, and then at the second ones, you have to wake up. You wake up, you wash your face outside in a bucket. You can't touch water or anything before you wash your hands and your face, it's

untidy. You going to make water for older people, especially for men. It's degrading a man's power to just wake up and go and do that without washing your hands.

Before you go to sleep, you must make sure that every bucket that needs to be filled with water, it's filled. There's no taps - you go and fetch water in the river or in the dam.

In the morning, you create fire. Then you boil water on the fire outside, you make tea. When you're done, you will pour warm water for my granddad, he can't use the cold water to wash his face. He goes to work about half past six to start work on the farm. In the meantime, I'm busy cooking with the traditional pots. I'm cooking mealie meal food and warming other water for people when they wake up. You keep on doing it, you make sure there's enough water to use it to wash. And you're making tea also with that in the meantime.

When my granddad comes with the boys - we used to call the workers like my granddad "the boys" - you have to wash your face for sweat and your hands for dishing. He comes with the milk that they milk the cows and then you have to put it in a clean cloth and pour the milk to be clean, strain the milk and then dish for him. He has to eat first. They got the 30 minutes to come and eat breakfast and then he goes again.

School is starting at 8. So I have to run that whole way to school. After school, we'll be home about 3, I do the same thing. I soak the samp and, same thing, all the time. There was never a time like for homework - that was not an important thing in our lives.

I tell you, I used to hate going back to that farm. The main thing was, I hated to go back to where my Aunt Harriet was. She used to stand on my way. I was in the choir and I won Bible competitions. She did not like about me being so famous in this church and go to Aliwal North and go for beauty contests. I used to win beauty contests a lot too. She did not want the teacher at Lion Hill to adopt me. She did not want Mrs. Brown to teach me English. She was a stumbling block a lot in my life. It's like she's got a hold on my life. She was the one that makes decisions in the family and she kept the secret about my father.

8

Even then I don't think I saw it as normal that I was not raised with my mom. Mostly children in the farm had their parents around. Even if they were not like couple parents, their moms will be around. It was me and my other friend that I can

remember didn't have parents there and it was hard for both of us. She was also babysitting the other children. Her aunties were more or less the same age as my aunties. When they are going for dance over there, we have to wash the nappies. Even at six years old, I knew a nappy can't stay long on that child's pompies. You have to get the child out of a nappy, you grow up knowing it. I didn't see that with the child that had their parents around.

There is a tradition of when you are born as a first born, you belong to your grandparents. For me, it was abnormal because I was not the first child, I was the third child. So in all ways of culture, it totally didn't make any sense in my situation. I hate it. It's very rare that the people that are keeping that child in their home really love the situation. Very, very rare. If white South Africans think it is normal, it's because they see it with domestic workers. They think it's the culture of the Xhosas; it's not. It's the culture of poverty when it happens.

9

Even today, very few people believe in themselves. Very very few. I look at the concept of working hard. If I say I was working today, I mean physically working. There was no other working rather than just physical working. If you come and say, "Oh, I was working today," you're meaning you were doing things mentally and all that. For me it's like that is not work. A white person is the person who have to work in the office; a black person work physically, so you just a servant all the time. Not a servant in terms of like being a secretary or whatever, no. Mostly that was for white people and for coloured people in South Africa. You a servant in terms of clean the house, feed the animals, cook the food. So the servant thing is very much deep. As a black person, this is where you belong. You just do it. For instance, you just know you have to smile for these white people. You can't be found sitting or they think you're lazy. You can't eat at the same time as whites are eating. You just can't stick around where whites are; you have to pull away, be in a little corner. You can't make noise around whites. I'm trying to think back now in the farm - when they finish eating, then you have to go and pick up whatever that they finish doing. It's just in you - you don't expect them to do that. It's just in you already and they know it's in you. You see, the apartheid was already rooted in my life, in my time when I was born. The enemy was already working. It was already successful at the time.

10

When I was hurt, I used to go walk and run in the hills, singing and singing about what I'm going to do when I leave this place. I had a way of escaping the hurt when it was happening. Mostly it was about my angel. I used to talk to my angel so much. I just knew my angel was with me, we singing together, we practicing together, anything that I was doing, my angel was with me. God was a good God that kept me going. In many ways in my life, I did not show how I feel. Even if I'm angry, I'm hurt, I will always try to please these people in order for me to survive, to have tomorrow. Or for them to keep me till tomorrow.

In the Xhosa tradition, there's not angels really. I grew up in my grandparent's house and they were Roman Catholic, but their religion was mixed with a black African tradition. They believe on the forefathers and they believe that the forefathers were looking after them. So I also grew up believing my forefathers are looking after me. But as I grew up, I couldn't really be strong in that belief because I didn't know who was my really forefathers. I didn't even know who was my really father. So that tradition was confusing me.

That's why I believe somehow I chose my own tradition, not culture, but tradition. If you're a Christian, you can think, "I talk to God, my angel brings a message to God." The Xhosa believe the forefathers are the ones that bring a message to God. So it somehow comes together. They believe if you do anything like slaughtering cows, cutting of a child, the forefathers will say, "The angel of God must protect the child." God works close to the forefathers as Christians believe God works close to the angels. So, it does not contradict at all.

Some Christians believe if you do the traditional cutting, you are given to the dark spirit. I refuse to believe that because if, Ali, the dark spirit was so bad, I shouldn't have been in this world. I should have been killed long back. And if the spirits that Christians call dark did not work, apartheid should have destroyed the black nation completely. But the black nation prayed to that God and slowly that God is conquering that past of the apartheid, because he is God. They believe the forefathers are carrying the message. Who is this Christian that can say it's wrong?

11

In places like Dodrecht, when you hear about the news, it was always like knowing what happened yesterday or after a few days. So, I didn't have the effect of being faced with a thing direct. 1976, at the time, I was in the farm repeating my grade 6. Our teachers taught us to let us know about the Soweto uprising. We knew that in the clever places, black people are standing for all the blacks. In Dodrecht, we were

totally in the hand of white people there, which people still are. Totally controlled by the farmers there. So what do you think they did? They oppressed more. I just remember that they will say, "When people knock to come and ask for places to stay, you don't open the door because there's lots of terrorists." Farm people did not know what is the terrorist, because they were working for farms, not educated. The only thing that we were told, it was the side of killing, killing, killing. "They can kill you." So we did not have any really round story of why are they killing, who are they fighting for, why are they fighting, who are they aiming, who is their enemies. The threat was around the word 'terrorist.' "There's a lot of terrorists and they are going around looking for places to stay."

But in my granddad's house, when somebody knocks, there was nothing like, "Check who's there." You open and you say, "Come in." You don't let a person stand outside. He really trusted people, he trusted human beings. He will let the so-called 'terrorists' into our house. My grandmom and my granddad had that value of giving people a place to sleep. As a matter of fact, when you eating, there must be food that it's kept over just in case someone come knocking, that that person can have food. It doesn't matter how little is that food, sometimes we will have no food! My granddad used to emphasize that - you never worry about food, you share food as much as you can.

He used to say to me, "Never break the law. It's bad to break the law." Telling the truth was the main thing with my granddad. So, then I will say to him, "But you breaking the law. Baas say don't let people sleep over because umnqolobi," which is the translation of "terrorist" in Xhosa.

He said, "The only time you break the law is when the law is hurting another human being." He will tell me about when the boys go to the mines, they will be given a place to stay by other people on their way. "Can you imagine your cousin, not having a place to stay and not having food, going to the mines after walking for a long time? Even in the Bible, there were people that were walking and other people were sharing food with them. I'm sure they did that to Jesus as well." So, he will make me to understand why he's doing it and he will tell me that's a value that I must never forget in my life.

12

My granddad was the only parent I ever knew and at the time, I didn't even see that he was a type of a parent. He is a man that I love dearly. When I was struggling deep

in Christianity, I tried to believe everything they tell me, like the ancestors are evil spirits. But I knew my granddad could never be an evil spirit. I wanted him to be my ancestor, I wanted him to look over me. He loved me to bits. I always had to compromise between Christianity and my God, who I know loves me and loves my ancestors.

People that knew my granddad respected him so much in that farm and neighboring farms. Most of my wisdom, I get it from him. He used to love that I make Amaherwu and he will say I must pour him that traditional beer. He'll call me, "Nonzwany," and he'll ask me questions.

"Do you think Ndinga is poor?"

I'll say, "Yes, you are poor. Look at me, I only got one dress."

He'll say, "I want you not to look at poverty that way of poor and rich. Being wealthy is investing in another human being. Like what I'm doing now to you: I'm wealthy, I'm sharing the wealth with you by giving you my world. When you share your place with someone, that's wealthy, it will stay in that person's life and it's an investment to help another person one day. Whenever you share with someone, you investing in heaven. And that will be rewarded to your descendants because that's what God is." His wealth was to invest in me.

He used to make an example of the farm owners. He'll say, "You see they are so wealthy," and he'll tell me how the grandfather Brown founded the farm with my granddad when my granddad was 16. Mr. Brown built it with his son and then they ended up having money. He said, "If Derek," Derek was now owning the farm, he's the grandson of the family, "If Derek can go and can drink up all his money, all that wealth is gone. He can lose it in any way. So even the investment that I'm doing on you, it's up to you how you use it. It's not up to me."

My granddad was so smart. I always wonder, why did he stay in that farm, why did he stay in that situation? Could he have been far? He was one of the people whose family lost their lands in what is called Transkei.

When I was young, he was in his 40's, but he looked so old. When he died, he was 71 years. It was amazing. "He's only 71 years?" I thought even all the years when I was young, he was 71; he looked very very old.

13

In this country, at that time, I think every black child grew up knowing you are a servant to someone. You are born, you are growing up, you are raised by people that are believing that way. You going to work for the baas, the owner of the farm. You must be trained so well to be able to go to the mountains and fetch wood and fetch water, make sure that the bucket is full because when you about 14, 15, you getting married. And as a boy, when you about that age, you going to the mines or you working in the farm. So, there was never another life more than that. And that did not escape me, I was also one of those children that thought that way.

Where I was, it was really the lowest level of farms, it still is the lowest level of farms. Where you don't have any access of another life, besides what is in the farm. We grew up with some integration of the mindset that we are slaves. Sort of like some genes way of thinking that we are slaves.

But I think my eyes was open when I got to places. If I go to the town in Dodrecht, my eyes will be open for better things, my mind will be open for better things. I managed to notice the nurses when I passed them. I started wanting something better, I wanted to move on. Immediately when I noticed about these people, I just wanted to really go and stay in the township in Dodrecht and I wanted to be educated. When the radio Xhosa will be having small stories, I listened to those stories and they were challenging to me, they will talk about how the children go to high school, they will be singing and you hear the teachers. Especial the stories challenged my mind a lot about to be a teacher, about going to a college. So I always wanted that life.

14

I remember I was hanging the nappies and the washing. And I was singing. I was so hurt. I finish hanging and I took the bucket to go and fetch water and I stayed in my dream place, under the windmill by the dam. I look at the side where you could hear the noise of the train every time about half past five. You hear the noise just behind the mountains, which is far. I will always wish to go in that direction of the train. While that is happening, the windmill is making that nice noise. I dreamt there. I dreamt to be a doctor under that windmill. I dreamt to do many things under that. And the sun will disappear. I will always wish to go where the sun goes.

5

This day I was sitting there and I think I needed my mom more. But, when I needed my mom, I didn't have a picture of how it's gonna be. I just knew I needed a home, my parents.

That's where I used to sit and dream all my dreams. I'd stay there till the sun goes down.

I can never imagine any white South African to say, "I understand what you went through," to each and every of us. I can never imagine that. Because even if you explain as I'm explaining to you, I can't make it right. Sometimes you feel, "Why must we tell people about this? What is the difference it's going to make?" They can never imagine this life, they can never, though I can.

I thought of those things before I went to find my father. I had the feeling that I wanted a bigger life. I had a feeling of like, "I can be like white people." That's why I even wanted to be educated as a white person, to be a white person. And, Oh, God is so good. Because I jump over and I left that place.

Chapter 2

I'm gone

15

Now I was seeing a bigger picture and I knew at this point I don't have anyone who's going to help me to get to that. I have to get it myself. I trusted the investment of being raised up to the age of twelve, is enough to help me face the world. I had no clue. I didn't even know that there were tar streets. When we talk about town, it was totally a blank thing that I was getting into it. But I had that hope, there was that light that it's going to be okay.

When I finished my grade six for the third time, I was about twelve years old. In a farm school, there's no strict grades. But I finished all there was to do. I wanted to go further, but my grandparents didn't want me to go away from them. They didn't see the need for a girl to be educated and I was still pretty young.

So we went searching for my father. I went with my sister who was also living on the farm at that time. No one sent us, we just heard that he was in Ilinge, by Queenstown, after the divorce. We left, trusting we will find him and he will care for us.

16

We walk something like from here to Cape Town, roughly 30 kilometers. I was so tired. We were going on the road from the farm to Queenstown and this guy stopped with this big lorry and he gave us a lift. It was one of those big trucks that take sand to work on the road.

Ali, it was something. It's a huge tall, tall truck and we have to climb and I try to get in the back and I fell. I went from the third step - oops - to the floor, from high up. I was bleeding and everything, but I climb again. At the end, I was on top. When we got in there, we saw the lorry was carrying sand. All the way to Queenstown there's full of sand in our hair and our clothes.

We passed Queenstown and then we went to where it was called Transkei. So we passed the white people and we went to the place where there was only black people. When we got in the township Ilinge about 9:00, I knew we must not ask for my dad. I knew we must ask his cousin. It was a totally different situation, totally different setup from the farm. It's a township, it's big, big schools, where I'm not used to that.

The children are clean, they wear shoes, it's so a confrontation that you cannot imagine. How do you settle with those people? They're so higher than you. At this point, you're not even thinking what will be the difference between these people and the white people - which you the lowest of all of them.

Finally we got to this auntie's house very late. The house was so clean, it's a two room. Everything is shining and the children are dressed nice, totally another situation from that farm. The shoes are clean and all. We just sat in a little corner, we were so intimidated by this life. My aunt was okay, but her children didn't welcome us at all because we looked very funny, we looked very poor, I can imagine. We didn't have shoes and the sand from the lorry was all over - in our hair, our dresses, all up and down our legs. And we sat there hungry and tired. My feet were swelling because we were walking barefoot and it was not a tar road. In that area by the farm, there was no tar roads really. But they made a place for us to sleep. School! The following day I didn't want to wake up, I was so tired.

17

We admired the polished floors, you know, the tap it type and we told my auntie's children how we used the cow's mess to clean the floors. I could see they didn't welcome us. How are they going to explain to other children, the neighbors, where they pick up these children? But their mom did welcome us. She was very concerned about me, but at the time I didn't realize why she was concerned. We told her we wanted to look for my father. She knew that he was working in East London for railways so she kept us for the whole month before we went to look for him.

When we finally got there, Ali, he was confused. The only other person that was at home, it was his wife. We didn't know at the time that my dad is married to another woman.

This stepmother said to me, "Do you know that your parents are divorced?"

I said, "Yeah, I know."

And then she said to me, "Do you know why that they are divorced?"

I said, "No."

She said, "Because of you."

"Because of me." And I'm crying.

She said, "Yeah, because you're not your dad's child. That's why your parents were fighting all the time." I didn't know this sort of fighting because I never stayed with my mom or my dad. I didn't know. She said, "That's why you never stayed with

them. Your mom just gave birth to you, she stayed with you for a while. And when she could see she couldn't hide you anymore, that you didn't look like other children, she started to take you to your grandparents in the farm." It started to make sense.

The man that is supposed to be my dad, he was there. He didn't say anything. He didn't say, "No she's lying." He was just listening. He said, "I remember when you were a baby, you were a nice fat little girl that was looking so beautiful." Then he said to me, "Your mom should tell you your dad."

Ali, that was like, it's the end of the road. This was the guy that I walk, I look for him, I never have a chance to stay with him, and I ran away to get hold of him, to have a relationship with him. Today I'm hearing that he is not my dad. And he's not saying it's not true - he's sitting here.

It was like I'm walking but I don't feel what I'm doing. Like you're floating as you're walking. I was totally shocked with this whole thing.

18

In my confusion, I found it hard to understand how they cut my finger when I was born, the part of the ancestors. Because what I found out is my mom did not conceive me from her husband. So what tradition did they exercise on me? Because when they get to talk to the ancestors, you must know those ancestors, you must call the clan names. So what names did they call? When I start to think about that, I was more furious. Now I knew why my grandparents wouldn't allow me to find my dad. They knew the dad that I thought was my dad was not my dad, so there will be clashes and I'll start to know about the whole thing. I was very angry about it.

So why did they cut my finger? They still did it, which means they knew who was my father. My mother's family, my grandparents did know. And they never told me.

19

After that, things started to be very tough in Ilinge and my so-called Dad and his cousin said they were going to take me back to the farm, but they never really have money. So, I talk to the child that was my friend, Lindy. Lindy told me also she doesn't know who is her dad. We actually decided together, we'll never get married, we hate married, we hate men. We hugged fingers as a covenant against marriage. Lindy was also angry at her mom, not knowing exactle her story. Believe it or not, it's sad to be an African child because you are not allowed to ask questions. Her

mom was a strong woman and a teacher. Lindy said to me, "You can come and stay with us. My mom is looking for someone to clean our house." It was Lindy and her aunt and her mom. Her mom said I can stay with them, but I have to work for them. So I stayed with Lindy's family and my sister was forced to go back because she was pregnant. She was two months pregnant and she was much older than me - maybe 18 at the time? But we didn't know about, "How old are you now?" You know, the date, the birth. Like now we celebrate the "Oh, it's my birthday!" We didn't know that.

I got a school to go and do grade eight. I apply for my own application for school. They were amazed. I looked very bad, funny, poor, but I could apply in English. I think it was good. So I stayed with them as a servant and as a friend to Lindy. When Lindy study, get done for things tomorrow, I'm cleaning. I'm washing the dishes, I'm sweeping, I'm shining the floors and everything. And when I finish, I start studying for my test or whatever for tomorrow, doing my homework. I must make sure they got bread in their lunch. Then the following day we all go to school.

When we got back, I must make sure they got food. But it was a normal thing for me to do because I was doing it anyway with my grandparents in the farm. I was looking after their grandchildren.

In that area in Ilinge, it was only Xhosas. So, I stay with Xhosas there and Lindy's mom was also like my foster parent because she was looking after me. She will make sure everything is fine. I had asthma, so she will take me to the doctor. She will buy me shoes. But I was working for them at the same time.

So that happened till the end of that year. At the end of that year, she gave me money to go back to the farm. I went back to the farm with shoes that time. I had shoes and I had my grade eight.

20

On my way back to the farm, I was shaking, I was disappointed. I think somehow I was thinking already about the ways of running away. At this time I also wanted to know the truth from my mother, the mother that I don't know. Also I was scared because I ran away, you remember? What are they going to say? And I knew what life will be like on the farm. Oh dear Lord, I was so worried.

But they really respected me when I came back. They were not annoyed with me. My granddad hugged me. The others were just fine, they said, "You look nice." I think I did look nice. You see, I was not like my sister. I didn't let anyone run over me that much. I'm sure they knew now I can take control of so many things because

to them, it was a shock for me to go to Queenstown. Queenstown is a luxury compared to Dodrecht. No one in those farms would think of just going to Queenstown, because they will think they will be lost and there's lots of cruelties in Queenstown. But as a child, I just went to that life. So they respected me. I explained to them how was the year, how was Ilinge, because Ilinge for them is like Cape Town, you know, it's a big town. And Queenstown is Joburg to them. So I explain these things.

At this point, they wanted to try to get me to get married. My mom apparently had her boyfriend's cousin that was an older guy – already they were arranging a marriage for me. Inside me, I was so, "I don't want to be here." I was already preparing for the next move, but I didn't know where.

21

When I went to see Mrs. Brown, she didn't seem like she was happy to see me. But, she was not angry to see me, she just instructed me to do things. I was thinking she was going to be angry and say, "I bought uniforms for this child and she ran away." She did not. Mrs. Brown is the first person that send me to school, the first time to kindergarten. She's the one that she will make sure she will talk over my grandparents and my aunt that they must let me to go for beauty contests. I'm talking about kindergarten now till sixth grade, my grandparents wouldn't want me to go.

She asked me, "Why did you come back?" I told her why, but I didn't tell her the long story about not having a father. But somehow she knew because apparently my grandparents were not supposed to keep me in the farm if my parents are not working in the farm.

I think she wasn't mad because the way that she was predicting my life, she knew it's not going to go anywhere if I stay in that farm. And she knew pretty soon I'm going to be forced to get married. And that guy will pay lobola. I think she was always hoping that I will leave that farm, not that she don't want me in the farm, but for the sake of my future. She really did love me, that woman. But she never said that.

22

That December, my mom came to the farm to visit her parents. That was the first time to really see this woman that was my mom; the first time I can recall her face, like saying I know what is her features and her voice. I just came from the

mountains to pick up woods from the forest. When I got there, she was there. She didn't say come here and give me a hug or anything. She just say, "Look at her, she's so untidy! They want boys but they don't even look after themselves." I didn't expect that. I expected she was going to say, "You're tall, you've grown, you are a grown up girl. What grade are you? What you doing?"

I just looked at her.

Then we are given apples, she brought red apples. A apple was a really big thing to get, hey? I get this apple and I sat on a chair there. I wasn't used to her so I sat there looking at her movements and everything. And I ate my apple

Days after that, I remember I was cleaning the floors, using the cow mess, the manure. We use the cow mess to clean the floors and also to make the floor of the house. You just refresh it when you see it's starting to color green and wear thin and then you put another one. When you do that, you must make a circle with your left-hand arm and then use your right. It smells terrible. So, as I was doing that, she noticed I was not using this arm, my left-hand arm. She notice and she was angry at me, why I'm not using it. She said, "How can you work if you're not using both your arms?" Then I looked at her. I don't easily defend myself. I look at her and I continue. Then she took me here around the collar.

She said, "Look at me!"

My aunt say, "Can you see? She's very cheeky." Maybe I was cheeky by not answering her.

My sister said, "But can't you see her arm is broken and she can't use her arm?"

When she pick me up for the second time, she look at my eyes and my tears were just rolling. She asked, "How? Where?" And then I went to her and I'm full of this mess - my dress. You know when you got a panties, you can roll your dress in your panties so it doesn't drag in the manure, but I was full of the mess because I didn't have panties. She say, "You're untidy and everything." She was smart - she was living in Cape Town now. I tried to come close to her but she couldn't really bring me close to her because I was dirty with the mess - and smelly. I remember she wanted to see my arm.

She found the left side was navy to shoulder - really, really navy. And she said to me I must lift my arm. And when I lift my arm, my arm didn't lift up. It was broken about a year. I can't stretch it straight. It was broken before I ran away to Ilinge. And it was still paining especially when it was cold.

She said, "Why?" And she started to want to be a mom. I didn't need her at that time because she should have seen this from the first day. But then she started to take me to the doctor and they said they can't help unless if they can operate me. She said, "No, they can't operate." My arm had to heal on its own.

23

I was so miserable on that farm. I knew in Dodrecht, there's nothing that I can do. I am expected to get married, I'm expected to go and fetch the wood, I'm expected to gather the manure and make the house beautiful for when people comes for holidays in December, I'm expected to have a boyfriend and to get lobola, to bring lobola to the family and I'm expected to make traditional beer and to stay in good manners so that neighboring people can see me as a good woman to choose for their sons to get married to. And I knew I don't want that.

When I ran away to Queenstown, Ilinge, my hope first was education. I was going to be educated, I was going to be free from my chores at my grandmom's house and I was going to be having shoes and wear a clean uniform and be smart. When I say smart, I mean dressing - and also mentally, intellectually. And I did get education. I think those hopes and what I achieved when I was in Queenstown, Ilinge, made me to know that I can do it the next time. They made me to know I'd been right all the time; there's a bigger world; there's life better than that. How do I get there?

At this point, I was totally so knowledgeable, the conversations in the farms were very boring to me, the gossipings about small things, the suspicions. I just wanted to be out of that. Those are the other things that I didn't want, when I talk about the darkness. When I was running away that last time, I didn't want any negative darkness of the farm to come with me.

24

I met with my buddies which was Ntombise and Nozabalise. Apparently they spoke with Ntombise's brother's girlfriend - her name was Dorothy - and told her they wanted to go with her to Joburg. She said yes, but it was gonna be a secret thing. So they fill me in on this secret that is going to happen. This time, it's approaching Christmas, it's crazy. They will be leaving in the week after New Year's Day. I told them I want to go and they said they understand, I definitely need to go. They had money to pay the ticket, but I did not have money. And they knew my family don't give me money.

So we started working the strategy to get me money. Right through at Christmas, we were collecting money for me to run away in January. Finally, that last day, we got it right. I put my clothes mostly with their clothes. Then we went to everybody in the farm and tell them we going to town, they must send us with money if they want us to buy stuff. Because the house is far from town, if someone is going to town, you must tell everybody and then it's their chance to buy sugar or what they don't have at home. So they gave us money for sugar, another one will give us for soap, or whatever. And all the time, we knew that is not going to buy soap, we collecting my ticket. Shame. Poor people. I ran away with their money!

25

When I was running away the first time, I think I trusted people will take care of me as I walk. I will be fed and everything. And I trusted my angel is going to protect me. But this second time, I think somehow I knew I'm taking a bigger step. So I trusted God, though I was questioning it. I was questioning that trust because I knew I was going to do something that is not right - running away. So God might punish me for that. And I'm going to make the whole family mad because the whole family was around for Christmas. That year, I didn't enjoy that gathering of the family, when they come together for the holidays; I didn't feel like a part of it. Each and every moment when I'm outside the house or when I go to the toilet, which is in the field, I will feel so good just to be away from them.

But that day before we left I was another girl. I was obeying each and every thing; whatever I was doing, I was doing it for good-bye. I remember I even went to the Nqame, that thing that covers the wind where you cook - I went there and cleaned that grill. We were very lazy to wash the traditional pots, it's a black pot so it's hard to wash. That evening when I was doing the dishes, I washed all the pots. In that day I washed the cabinet, I tidied the cabinet. I used to love to tidy the cabinet, but that day I did it just to say good-bye. And I was talking to my angel a lot. It was like we're doing it for the last time in this farm!

The night before we left, as the sun was totally getting darker, I knew this is the last time this is happening. I remember late that evening, after dishing out food and washing the dishes in the evening, I went to the toilet in the field. I was facing parts of the mountain, directly where the eagles always make noise. I was aware of the noises that are made by nature, those small bugs that make a lovely noise. And I was saying good-bye to them. It was like I have to hear this because it's the last time that

I'm hearing it. As I was walking down, I knew, I'm walking for the last time down here. And I was sitting in the field, I knew I'm doing this for the last time. But at the same time, I was still afraid this won't happen. I will say, "Don't go there, don't go to doubts, don't think, 'What if it doesn't happen tomorrow?'" I just knew I was going to be more frustrated if it does not happen.

So that night I went to sleep after giving my granddad water and getting water for the morning to wash. Everything that I was doing, I was doing it extra personal with a touch not just of saying good-bye, but to say thank you for all this time. I went to sleep.

26

The following day, my heart was beating. The only thing that was scary for me, it was because my grandmom was sort of like a sangoma. If something comes to her, some feeling that says, "She must not go to town," she's got the final word. That was the only worry. When I'm finished getting ready, I throw the water I used to wash and wipe that bucket. Walking out the house, it was like I'm somehow flying. I was excited, I was scared, and I don't know how to explain this to you, it's like I'm having goose bumps. My aunt called me to give me something to buy for her at the last moment. My heart was like, she's going to say, "Don't go." But she gave me that and I was gone. When we're going to town, Ntombise and Nozabalise have to wave to show me we're leaving now because they're far from me. So they waved and then I left. I knew at that point, I'm gone. Anything that I do, I will be messing up myself. My Aunt Harriet is over in my life and I was calling on my ancestors to be with me, I knew my angel was with me, I was like, "God, let's just do this, just do this one for me."

I was so overwhelmed with fear of being caught, not the fear of where I'm going to. I cannot face staying in this situation. I think that's where my life was going to end, if I had to have another day in the farm. I had already told myself that I'm gone, this is my last day in the farm. So the fears were wrapping around me. I stayed as calm as I can, not to show people that I'm doing any move. Imagine when you are 13 years, making those plans of doing that. Making a plan of going to a huge place where even older people are surrounding you. Joburg was known as it's full of crime and there's so much racism there, you can be killed, it's so scary. And I knew that. And I did not fear to go to that place. But I got fear of finding myself having another night in that farm. That was what was overwhelming to me. And all that

was influenced by the moment of that day of knowing my father was not my father. Because if you understand, if you see in the story, before I knew that, my aim was to find my parents, especial my father. I will be educated. Now that stopped when I got in Ilinge. I was faced with some reality. So now I had to stand at my own, to find who I want to be in the world.

As I was leaving, the graveyards was on my right hand side. I said goodbye to my cousin who died. I said goodbye to my sister's baby, that she lost after coming back from Queenstown. After I passed that, I didn't want to look back. There's a board that says DV Brown farm and I passed it and was like, "I'm leaving." And you go down, you go down for a long time - I did not look back. Each and every thing that I was passing, it was like, "I'm gone." I passed the school, all the neighboring farms. And I was thinking about all the years that I was walking up and down from the school to the farm. Everything that has happened to me, every single thing that used to happen, I was remembering and saying bye-bye to them.

When I reached Nozabalise and Ntombise, the girls that I was running away with, I didn't want to look back. I was worried to be a pillar of salt like that woman in the Bible.

We walked from half past four in the morning, very early. You must leave early because it's very far. When you leave about half past four, you will be in town about, maybe nine. And it's hot, so you must really leave early. We're so excited, we're making noise and we're seeing ourselves being domestic workers, having our own lotions. Then we don't want to talk, it's like the wind is going to take this to our families and tell them so we'll be worried again and then we whisper. And then we're laughing, we're excited and scary, wanting to cry in my part. Then when we saw Dodrecht from that hill, looking down, I knew I'm seeing that as the last time, this is the final day. It's over.

27

Somehow my cousin knew I was running away during the day. Because he came looking for me. I was hiding in a house in Dodrecht because I must not let Dorothy know I'm running away with her and Ntombise and Nozabalise. She's not going to accept that. Around 12:00, 1:00, nobody must see you still in town because it's the time that you're supposed to start walking back to the farm. So as of that time, I must really hide. I was hiding and my cousin came and he said, "I heard you are running away." And I said, "No, I'm not." He said, "No, I'm not going to say you

must go back, I'm not going to tell anyone. But do you got enough food, I mean, did you eat?" And I said, "No, I did not eat." He went to look for food to get me.

When he came back, it was the time that we must head on, we must go to the train station. So he helped us to hide. He took our clothes straight to the station and then we were going like children that are going to the station, going amongst people that nobody knows us. When we get there, he's the one that help us to check nobody sees us. So we get there and then we hide under the carriage, under the seats. Then he pushed the clothes, the suitcases and people's things underneath to cover us. We didn't have a chance to say bye-bye; we hiding. And you must remember it's the totally not the picture that you got in your mind. It's not like a train station here in Bellville or something. It's an old old steam train. They collecting all the luggages carefully, it's a slow process. I can't even try to explain to you. But we ended up leaving at about half past four.

We left. I'm still hungry. I didn't eat the whole day. And after we left, then Nozabalise and Ntombise started to sit straight in their seats because Dorothy knows that they're running away with her, but she doesn't know about me.

Chapter 3

This Bigger World

28

We all had tickets in case the conductor finds us, but I couldn't let the auntie see me. I was under the seat. Nozabalise and Ntombise kept the ticket by them just in case I ended up being seen, then I won't be thrown out or whatever. I could hear when they ate their supper. I think we were somehow around Molteno. That was fine, I could take it, but I was very hungry. While they were talking, I was imagining everything because I'm under the seat. Then they started to switch off the lights and sleep. And I started to wee because I was really holding my urine. I wee now in the darkness because nobody can notice when the wee runs through the door. Then I was smelling.

The following day, they started to get themselves nice. They're going to be in Krugersdorp, in Joburg. They started eating and I couldn't take it anymore. I was very very hungry. I started screaming. Also in my mind, I knew, I'm far away from Dodrecht now. It will be hard for the auntie to take me back. If she's going to take me back, she will have to first get to her place and then get the process to take me back. So I started screaming and my friends started to rustle and say, "Don't make that. Don't do that to us." I scream. I was mostly very hungry and tired and I was wet and hot.

Then they pull the thing and then they found me there. She said, "What's this? No, you can't do that to me!" And, shame, poor woman.

I was standing there. She could recognize my face. She was, "What can I do? No, no." She was just confused and confused! She said, "You're smelling!" And I said, "Yes I do. And I'm hungry." I was crying. She made food for me and she said, "Go and wash." And I wash. You know those tiny little bathrooms in the train? I wash myself and then she was surprised when she found out I got clothes. She said, "You guys planned the whole thing!"

That's how I ended up in Krugersdorp, just outside Johannesburg.

29

In Krugersdorp, Dorothy was working for a Jewish family as a domestic worker. When we get there, she had just one room to stay in as a servant's quarter. She was forced to keep us in that room. No one must see us because she's not allowed to

keep children by the employer and by the law. The pass laws say she can't keep me, otherwise the employer will be in trouble. She is not supposed to keep anyone.

Dorothy sent us to Germiston, to see her sister Margaret to try to find jobs. It was so nice to be in a train - now we sort of like facing the world. Where Margaret was, it was more poor whites than Dorothy's place in Krugersdorp. I was hoping I must not get any place there. They will take us to these white people and then they must choose which girl they want. The people chose Ntombise. Ntombise was taller and she had breasts, so I think they trusted her. They took her and on the inside, I was saying, "I must not be chose here. I don't want to stay here." But I had no choice. They took her. The other woman that was in Pretoria took Nozabalise. So I stayed without having a job.

30

Then Margaret said that I must come back to Dorothy, to Krugersdorp. I remember that night, it was very late. When I got in the subway in Germiston, I ended up being alone waiting for the train. And the train changed. Instead of this platform that I was waiting, they said people to Krugersdorp must go to another platform. And we ran. I couldn't hear properly because they were announcing the train in Tswana, Zulu, all these languages there. You know that noise, "Wah, wah, bah, wah." You can't properly pick it up. Also, I had a fear already, "Will I be able to hear this?" So in my mind, there was this thing, "I can't hear, I can't hear." So I followed people and I keep on asking, "Is this Krugersdorp? Are you going to Krugersdorp?" But I asked that in Xhosa; I thought there would be someone who speaks Zulu.

Suddenly, nobody was in the subway underneath. I missed the train. I was very scared because I had nowhere else to go. I started singing. Oh, God, I sang my favorite song. All these years when I'm in a corner, I used to sing this song that said, "Even in darkness, you can see God." I had a trust on my angel but I think I thought only God who can bail me out of this one, not the angel or anything else.

The trains were not coming, so I found a corner of the station where I slept. I said over and over, "Even if in darkness, you can always see God. And your name glitters right through." I was laying there nervous but I could sing - not loud, I could dream the song in my mind.

The next day, early in the morning, I felt a hand on my leg, shaking me. An old man was waking me up. I got up to find the train to Krugersdorp. I got from Germiston to Krugersdorp, passing Joburg station, which is dangerous. But at the end I made

it. When I'm in Krugersdorp, I'm safer. The intimidation in Krugersdorp is actually that I'm not supposed to be seen on the street as a black child. That's the only danger. There are no thieves who are walking up and down, skollies or anyone that can hurt you. So I knew if I'm in Krugersdorp I'm safe. I must just not be seen by the police. Or whites that can call the police and say there's a black child walking around here.

31

When I left the farm, my big step was leaving the farm to get to Johannesburg. When I get to Johannesburg, whoo, there's white people here. How do you deal with them? How do you nod, you greet, you do all the time? Totally, I was confronted with another culture. I had to deal with it. That's something that I was totally not aware that this bigger world, this dream of leaving with the train, is going to take me to a huge shock like this. But I just get in and I was now here - I need to deal with it. When I got in that life, I knew I need to please those people, those are the keys, those are the people that define my life. Those are the people that feed us. On Earth, they are the ones that tell us when to breathe and when to not. I belong in the small corner, they belong in a huge house. I was satisfied with knowing that I have to work for whites. Actually, that's why I went there - I wanted to be a domestic worker. I went there to know that I'm going to earn money, I'm going to wear a overall, those clothes that people buy for domestic workers, and I'm going to be smart. One day, I'm going to have a boyfriend, I'm going to own a Vaseline Intensive Care. I'm going to be able to have the food, the leftovers of the white people. It's not like what was happening in the farm that we always cook the white peoples' food. Now I'm going to have it legally because I will be working for them. And nobody's going to tell me what to do. Except my bosses.

Through that, I started questioning something, I started thinking there's a bigger thing outside that. Somehow that bigger spirit made me not to be satisfied, though I thought I was going to be satisfied with that life. I knew there's something bigger, I wanted more to be a white person. I wanted more to live the way they live. I wanted to go in them in the brain and just find out why they do this, how come that they do that.

32

One day, Dorothy send me to buy bread and her employer's daughter didn't go to school. She was sick. When I went to buy bread, this child was looking through the window in her room and she saw this little girl passing by. Without letting Dorothy know, she walk out and when I got back, she wanted to play with me. I think they were pretty lonely, man. She wanted to play with me and I was shaking. Dorothy, now, found this tragedy. This child saw and she's going to tell her mom. And her mom knew at the end of the day about me.

But Dorothy's employer started to connect me with the Parker family because they were teaching together. She knew the Parker family were looking for someone to play with their little children. So they said they would hire me and help me do my grade 9. They were both teachers. But they didn't give me a place to stay in their yard. Why? They had the room. But that room was for their children to play, so it was full of toys and everything. They wanted their children to have a space. So they said they would take me, but I must get a place to sleep, which was strange. They could see I was a child.

33

I have a job with the Parkers and now, I am finally a domestic worker. It was not hard to learn that, to be a domestic worker because I think I've been a domestic worker my entire life. I just chip in and do the job. Nobody came to teach me how to work with this and work with that. The only thing that I was taught by Mrs. Parker was to use the vacuum cleaner and to use a polish machine. And I didn't take that long. Babysitting for her children, it's what I grew up doing.

The thing that was confronted to me was to see a double story house. It was fun for me because I was younger - I loved to go up the stairs. If I'm sent to do something or I'm doing something, I'll run up. So it was fun, I'm fresh, I'm doing it, though the house was really big.

In Johannesburg, what is also a new thing for me, was meeting a Venda person, totally another person out of the ethnic. We were told those are the people that eat people, they do all these funny things. Dorothy's boyfriend was a Venda, Phineas. Staying with them in the house was very awkward. They were having sex in the same room as we are and he's not my dad, he's another man and it was just a horrible feeling. When he comes home in the evening, it's such a tragedy, it's like I so wish I cannot be here. He was not mean, but the situation was not right. If he's taking off his clothes to sleep, I used to sort of like find a way to be out. Though he

will be having his short pants, but for me to look at his body, it was not on. And then for Dorothy, when she washes, she washes in front of all of us and she will be washing her private parts and it was like, "No, I want to find another place." So my life was in the run, or in the next step all the time, I was not comfortable where I was. I can't wait for the next step to find a job and a place to live.

34

See what domestic workers do in the afternoon, they go and sit in the benches of the street and meet in some corners and talk, and sometimes they take their bosses' children - it's a way of going for a walk with them. So we were sitting like that after I got work with the Parkers. I was looking and listening to them; they were talking about boyfriends and all the things. It was exciting to listen to them talking about boyfriends, but they were talking about things that I was clueless about. They were continuing with their lives, though being a domestic worker. But I was not really interested in the social part of it. My thing was to work, have nice food that white people eat, have my own room, have my freedom, dress in the cleaning clothes that maids wear and be clean in the street. Oh, also, when I learn about the phone, I wanted to have people calling me at work and also have my own madam. Those were the things that I was very much working for. And I wanted my education at the same time.

So we were sitting there and I know I had some books with me that I was reading them. Here comes this beautiful black woman, she's got really dark skin and dark hair and very neat and really loud. As she was coming close the others were gossiping about her, but at the same time showing her this wonderful smile. She found me in the corner of the street sitting with my books and writing. For her it was very cute that I'm so young and I can work and study. She got captured with this little girl that look so innocently immediately. It was also very strange to see a black child in any place where there was white areas in South Africa. It was only people old enough to be domestic workers.

Her name was Bukelwa. She said she felt very sorry for me being around these people, apparently they had a bad reputation. She ask, "Where do you live?" And I explain. She knew Dorothy. She said, "Are you staying with her?"

I said, "Yes, but I'm not supposed to stay there." Then Bukelwa said, "You can come and stay with me." She went to see the Parkers because Dorothy couldn't speak English properly. Bukelwa was much better to speak English. She wanted to know why don't they keep me in their place. They explained the whole thing and she said,

"I will keep her for awhile. But she's not going to stay for a longer time because I'm also not allowed to keep an extra person in my room." Again, it's because of the pass laws.

35

It was also a very horrible situation, Ali. Bukelwa was staying there with her sister and her sister was having a boyfriend that always come every day. Bukelwa's boyfriend will also come. At Dorothy's, I was being fed by her. Then I started working at the Parkers, unknowingly that I'm getting to an adult situation. Now I had to stand at my own. If I go to Bukelwa's place, I had to bring food, I had to contribute. I'm no more a child now.

So whenever I go to Bukelwa, I had to bring some food with me. And the Parkers did not understand that. It's my first month and I have to make enough food from them and take it to Bukelwa for other people to share. I couldn't tell them that. For them, culturally, that was a waste. But my culture, I have to make enough so that we all share. So I will bring whatever that I bring and if I don't have, then I won't eat at Bukelwa's place in the evening.

36

This day, I finished working and then I walked to Bukelwa's. It was a distance, but I did love that. I would meet this homeless woman and greet her on my way. I always try to get at Bukelwa's late, so I used to take my time when I'm walking back to her place. I got home and I think it was one of the days that I didn't have food with me, so it was a day that I knew I'm not going to eat in the evening. It was Bukelwa's boyfriend and his friend and Bukelwa's sister's boyfriend and Bukelwa's sister and then Bukelwa - I think we were five or six in one room. They cook in this one room, people have sex here, they sleeping with each other and I'm like, I'm seeking the next step, the better life all the time. I'm thinking, "If it can just happen, if I can end up being a domestic worker that has got my own room."

I studied for awhile. And then we all went to sleep. You know, that tired, man. I was working during the day and I just study at night, though I was fourteen at the time. We were sleeping. I think it was about 2:00 when the police came. I was deep in sleep and the door was a zinc door. They knock a big knock in the door and then it was in the window, say! And the dog in the yard. I was so scared! That

intimidation, that whole thing. It was horrible. Apparently the neighbor saw us in Bukelwa's place and she called the police.

The policemen came inside, I think they were a lot, something like 10. I remember getting dressed here in front of them and I remember I didn't even dress warm, I didn't have anything to dress warm. So you just dress, dress, dress and then you have to be in the van and you get cold. As you walking, you touching the ground small because this guy is holding you at the back and pushing you. And when you get down from Bukelwa's maid's quarter, it's steps all the time, so Bukelwa's sister fell.

So you get pushed in the van and then the van is going like wooo, with a siren. I was thinking, "What is happening to me?" I got a nightie and just a blazer with flip flops. It's so cold. When we get to the jail, it was wet. The place where we were was wet, wet, wet, wet – the floors. We went to the cell and were sitting in the corners. For me, it seems as if it can't be a cell, that you can't keep people to something like that. The water was dribbling. There were no beds. It was just a gray blanket. That's the blanket you sleep with or you put it on the floor, so you choose what to do with it. So I didn't lay on it. I will just try to wrap myself around and sleep in the corner. The next day, it's Kruger's Day. So no one can come and fetch us. It's holiday. No one worries about any documents or anything on holidays. So we sat there the whole day.

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The Parkers didn't come the next day because I was not registered to work. It was a complicating issue with my age - I'm not supposed to work. What are they going to say? I don't know how they got it right, but they came there on the third day to pick me up. They said they were trying right through. I didn't ask them how, I was just happy that I'm out that day. When I came out, I was so sick. I had asthma, I had a pain on my private parts. I think it came from sitting and sleeping on the cement. When I came back, the house was a mess and I started working.

So, I started to have a sense now of apartheid. And I started now to be curious and ask why are we not allowed? And Mrs. Parker was right from England, so she explained to me. She explained what is happening, she explained that now I was gonna be more cautious and they were forced to put me in their room now. I was no longer allowed to go to the Kruger's where Bukelwa was working. And I was gonna be more cautious now not to walk around because they know about us.

In Johannesburg, that's when I started to know some more about politics. That's when I started to be able to say words like "discrimination" and "politics," to know about how negative white people are. I didn't learn it in a full way, because it's a progress, but it was a start. Believe me, I was not exposed to any black person that was connected to the struggle. I think I knew about Mandela; I just knew he was a 'terrorist.'

As from that, it was no turning back on being an adult. And it was no turning back of like I'm going back to the farm, I'm giving up. I didn't even think of that, giving up and going back to the farm.

It was the first time that I had my own room. I was actually scared to have my own room, but I was so relieved to have my final time after working. Though they will call me in time to time to do work, I had my privacy. I had my bed, there was a toilet. I don't own it, but it's controlled in a way by me. It was a sense of a freedom and I think it gave me something to look for, to see it that it can work. But I wanted the freedom of having visitors as well. Because among us, Nozabalise, Ntombise and myself, it's a dream come true that we're sitting the three of us in each other's rooms and we're the highest profession of being domestic workers. So I wanted to have that freedom, but I didn't have it with the Parkers.

38

I was lucky at the Parker's because whatever they eat I eat, you know. Some domestic workers are only allowed two slices of bread each day from the family kitchen. I didn't have to count my bread. If I want to add more, I'll add more. They will dish me as they are dishing.

But what was funny, one day Mrs. Parker said to me I can make myself Viennas or egg. Viennas is like a sausage. She said you can make for yourself Viennas or you can make bread. And I didn't understand properly. I thought she said, "Make yourself Viennas and egg and bread." And I made the three of them, in the afternoon. Just when I finished doing that and I sat outside to eat, she said, "How can you make, why did you do this?"

I was so shaking and I said, "Didn't she say I must eat?" I mean she was for me so funny because she never said I must not eat. She said, "This is a waste!" I was shaking and her husband was very scared of her. Mrs. Parker was very strong. When she's angry at her husband or something, we must all know we can't speak. So he was standing also there. He could understand I misunderstood the whole

thing and, at a later stage, he said, "No, darling, she did not understand." But once she start to be angry, she will be angry. But when she's okay, she's sweet. She was that type of a person. That's one of the things that didn't make me to feel happy there. They had a huge house, double story house, you will hear her screaming from upstairs and you know the day is bad today.

39

But one day Mrs. Parker was in hospital for a nose operation. And Mr. Parker started speaking Xhosa to me. I ask him how come he knows Xhosa. He explain, he is from Uki. Uki is next to Dodrecht. And he knew the Brown family. Mrs.Brown, he knew them all, the sons and everything. So in my mind, I started to think, "They are going to call the Browns and tell them I'm here, so I have to run away." Because one thing that I did not want, it was to go back to the farm. And so that's why I ran away from them.

So I started to say I need to get the money that they were keeping for me. I lied to them, "I need the money to send to my grandparents. My grandparents are very sick in the Eastern Cape." So, they trusted me, they gave me the money. And it was their last day to see me. But they didn't know that at the time.

That day I went to Krugersdorp station. I thought it was very easy. I didn't realize trains and times. I said, "I'm going to Cape Town."

They asked me, "Where in Cape Town?"

"I'm going to Mbgweni."

"Where is Mbgweni?"

They started to check. Then they say, "Oh, it's in Paarl. But it's tomorrow. You can only get the train from here to Park Station in Joburg. And then from that station, you can proceed to go." They told me how much must I pay and my money was really lower than that - it was not enough.

So, I was stuck. I couldn't go back to the Parker family because I saw them moving up and down - looking for me. So then, what do I do?

I started to think about that homeless auntie that I used to pass when I play with the Parker children in a field near their house. I will see she's getting ready to sleep over in a little corner somewhere away from the street. I went to look for that place. I find her making fire and she had the blankets around this fire. She had small things that she was cooking, making water for her to drink tea.

40

As a child, I hunted the name "home," to just say, "I'm going home to my family, to my mom." I never had that. I became so involved with the family system by many many families that I cannot recall. Somehow my angel gave me so many moms that has loved me so much because I hunted my mother so much.

All the women that have ever done things for me - Mrs.Brown; Lindy's mom; the Parker family in Joburg, Julie and Jamie - my last foster parents that I will tell you about; my aunt in Paarl - I think of these women and many many others, but they're not compared to the woman that has looked after me for three days in Krugersdorp. When I was sleeping outside with her in a empty space - like bergees - people who are homeless. I find that woman's the most strong woman. She didn't have a home, she didn't have money. She shared her bread - the entire lunch for the day.

I sat next to her with my luggage. I said to her, "I want to go to um... My name is Nonzwakazi and I want to... I'm going to my mom, I'm looking for my mom. And I know she's in Cape Town." I show her the paper there with the address, but she didn't understand me. She was Tswana.

So she said her says. And I was saying my say in Xhosa.

So we are looking at each other. No one understand another one. I thought she would understand me because Zulu is famous and Zulu is like Xhosa.

But then I started switching on to speak English and she understood me. I said to her, "I don't have a place to stay and my money is too little to get me in Cape Town." She ask me my name. I told her I'm Nonzwakazi. She couldn't really say Nonzwakazi. Xhosa is difficult to other black people even though it's a black language.

She ask where I come from. I didn't say I'm coming from the Parker family because I thought she will go and tell them.

She gave me her tea - I refused to drink it.

She shared her bread with me. But I didn't eat the bread! I don't know why - I was hungry enough.

She had a blanket and when I was getting ready to sleep, she said I must come and sleep with her. I put my clothes on and then I slept there. I shared three nights with her like that outside.

She never chase me away - it's amazing. Every morning, we wake up and go and hide the stuff, the clothes, and then we would go and make char, cleaning peoples'

houses. In each of her jobs, she was very careful to take food and eat. It was a contract. It was something like she must eat two or three slices of bread a day. But what amazed me is that she was sharing that little food with me. And, Ali, the last day, she toasted the two slices of that day for me. And she gave me as my provision. That amazed me. She toasted it and she put butter on it and she wrap it in a paper, and she put it in a plastic.

She took the train with me and we went to Park Station. She's the one who took control over everything, though she couldn't speak English good. I saw her putting her hand out of the bra and counting this money. This ten Rand was so shrink and she iron it. Then she counted the money and add it on my ticket. That ticket didn't get me straight to Paarl; it was not enough still. But she add her money which she's struggling so hard to get.

When I think about that woman, I think she is the mother of the nation - how many children did she do that to them? She gave her last money to add on my ticket. And she toasted the two slices that was her food for the day and she gave it to a child that she didn't know. I love the part of the toasting because she was adding love on it. And she took her money between her breasts. A woman is known because we differ from men mostly because we got breasts. Love is somewhere there. Do you understand? So, she was richer than all other women that ever care about me. And I don't know her name! She got me on the train and she told me, "You will do good in life." And I left that place. I left Joburg and came searching for my mom.

41

On my way, I didn't have enough money to come to Cape Town. The guard that was checking the tickets was speaking Afrikaans. This guy was huge, really built, like how we identify Afrikaner guys. My ticket was officially ending in Dedorens, which was still far from Cape Town. This guy told me that my ticket was ending; I need to get ready because after the next station I have to get off. After we past Dedorens, he came and ask me, "Why didn't you get off?"

I was crying. I told him, "I'm actually going to Paarl, I don't have money." He called me to his place where he was staying in the train. He hold me by the shoulders and he was saying, "Do you know it's illegal what you did?" Remember, at this time, to get into contact with a white person, it was a big thing; these are the people you're very scared of.

He asked, "Where's your mom?" with a very loud, interrogating voice.

I was explaining to him, "I don't have a mom, that's why I have to get to Cape Town, so I can find her."

"Go, go to your seat."

Later, he called me again and he said, "Do you have food?" And I said, "No, I don't have food." He gave me food from his food. It was my first time to see a sandwich - a food that was made very neat and there was eggs in it and paloney. In that journey, it was the first time that I ate something. He gave me a cup of tea in those paper throwing away type of a things. I ate, but I was still scared. What is he going to do? What he did. The word he used, "You know I can throw you out of the train?" This word was in my mind before he gave me food. He can *throw* me out. Why is he feeding me? I was so terrorized, though he gave me food. He would not talk in front of the people that I was with in the all black compartment. He will keep on calling me to his room. After a while, he said, "Bring me your address. Do you have the address of where you're going to?" I said, yeah, I did. I had my mom's cousin's address.

So then I gave it to him and he kept it. I was thinking, "He's going to throw me in jail..." I didn't know the difference between a police and those guys in the train. He was wearing some type of a uniform with a cap similar to police. So he was a policeman anyway to me. I didn't know who would come help me this time if he put me in jail.

But he didn't throw me out of the train. He keep on making sure that I'm eating, he will bring some food and check other peoples' tickets and come and do his job. When we get in Paarl, he said to me I must get my clothes ready and I got my clothes ready. I was shaking. He said, "You're going to be arriving now. The station after this one is the station where you have to get off." When we got in Paarl, he got me off and he called the guy that was sweeping on the station. At the time I thought he was a white person - it was the first time I encountered coloureds. I thought coloureds were also white because he spoke Afrikaans to him. He gave this guy money for me to pay my ticket for the taxi. He gave him the address to make sure that this taxi drops me exactly in front of my uncle's house. So he was helping me all along. After I started to learn about Afrikaans and politics in Cape Town, that's one of the things that I come to think. Racism is not in everything; in some things, there is love. When I think of that later in my life, when I saw the police interrogating us, telling us, "After two minutes you have to disperse..." they were built like that guy in the train. And now I'm talking about many years after I met him. But whenever I got

encountered with a guy that looks so much Afrikaner and I'm building all these assumptions, "He's racist," and all that, I think of that guy. I think of how he interrogated me first and then he started feeding me and he saw me as a child. He made sure that I was safe; he paid his money. He didn't need to do that. I was totally under his power. Totally totally.

So how will you analyze that and put racism and everything? How would you analyze his feelings and the law that he was working under and all that? I did break the law. You leave Johannesburg to Cape Town, you need to pay full price - even today! Even if whatever government will be where in which country in the world. So I did something that was bad. He saw me and he treated me as a child.

Chapter 4

Builed of clay: life in Cape Town

42

At this point, I'm like, "I'm finally having a home. I'm going to sleep in my mother's house today and I'm going to be going to school. I'm in the township!" This taxi guy asked me where I'm going to, he's Xhosa. I'm coming from where there's no Xhosa in Krugersdorp. So I'm excited about hearing my language, I can see the children coming from school in their uniforms. I'm excited about everything! Life is going to start for me.

I got dropped in my uncle's house. The house was beautiful as compared to anything that I know a person can have - it's a three room house. My aunt answered and I told her I'm Gertrude and explained she saw me when I was young in the farm. "Go and put your things on the other side," she said.

She said I must go and make myself bread and she told me where I would find butter in the fridge. She's asking, "Do you know what a fridge is?" And I'm like, "Ye-es," with a high, singing voice. I'm giggling and laughing. She knew my life on the farm, not knowing fridges. She's forgetting that I've been in Johannesburg now and I know about fridges. As I'm putting butter on the bread, I hear she's talking to her friend.

She's like, "I wonder where is she going to keep her?"

You know, they talking low, "What is she going to do about that?"

They talking about my mom now, immediately I could pick it up. "What is she going to do about her?"

Immediately I felt some confusion. *What is she going to do about her?* That made me to lose some hope. I was now anxious to meet my mom. To just my mom must come.

My aunt said to the children they must check when my mom passes. And then they called her to come in. When she saw me, she was like, "Yo, yo, yo, yo." And my mom was happy, shame, to see me. Immediately she said I must gather my things together, which they were already gathered together. And we walked, crossing the township to the hostel side in the rain.

At this time, I don't know the difference between the hostel and the township, I'm just walking with her.

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I think this was somehow a day to choose whether I want to fall or I want to continue. But I did not realize I was caught in that. Seeing these students from school with their uniforms and being clean and laughing made me to dream, dream more than before. But when I got to where my mother's boyfriend lived, I saw my mother was living with him in the hostel, I suddenly couldn't dream anymore. At first, I didn't think really she was living there. I couldn't. We walk in and I find this is a hostel, amawulwani, - it's all men! It's one big huge room separated by sheets and curtains. I remember I was so caught, I was so confused, "Am I going to stay here?" It's clean, it's very nice. But it's all men! The beds were made up so high, put a lot of things under a bed and then it was high high high. Why was it like that? It's not because what people say, that the people were scared of Tokoloshe, or bad spirits. It's because they making a space to pack the things under the bed and then they feel it's safe.

But it's clean, and there's lot of food, traditional food. I met my mom's boyfriend; Diya was his clan name. He was greeting me, "Oh, Ntombi."

But I was so confused. The excitement that I had was shifted.

I was still hoping for a home. I was still feeling, "It's going to pass. You're going to your mom's home. You're still going to go."

My mom was dishing food for me and she told me I will be sleeping on this other side, on the other bed. She said I must put my things there.

I was like, "No, not again. I want home. I want home. I'm looking for home, I'm here for a home."

44

The difference between the hostel and township is a township is like where families live. It will be mostly two bedroom houses at that time in Mbekweni before people extended their own homes. Some were solid houses, some were made of cement only, which was a method that was used in Ilinge. In the hostel, it's a place that's just one big room that about four or five men are sharing. In the hostel where my mom's boyfriend lived, there were meant to be four people that live there. So it's just only men that live there. The only way that they divide their rooms was through hanging something like a curtain or a blanket when they bathing or something. And I think that only started when they started to sneak in women, when a woman has to wash.

It was perceived as a very lower life for a woman to go to the hostel. Better for women that are coming from the Eastern Cape or from the rural areas to visit their husbands, but anyone from townships was looked at as sort of like a whore if they go to the hostel, especially if they live there. It was looked at like it's a lower life, it's a man's territory, so anyone that goes there, it's like you're going to sell yourself. That's why it was so degrading to me, knowing my mom was doing that, staying with a man in hostel.

45

The next day, we had to walk to my other aunt's house. It was noisy, it's a shebeen. My mom went to talk to my aunt who was cooking. I sat on the street waiting for her. I was totally lost. At this point I just missed the family in the farm. I felt like, "What is happening? What is this?"

I'm in Cape Town, I'm not in the farm. I want to live with that. I envied those people's lives - they way they talk, it's smart, it's so new. But I don't want this. I thought I was going to come in a house and relax and sleep. I'd be home. I'm not having this.

After some time, my mom came out and the following day, she said I must gather my things and go to stay in the shebeen. It was terrible. There's no really explanation, why is it happening. Does she have a place or not? I couldn't ask her that. It's traditional, you don't ask questions. On top of that, I don't know this woman, I don't know this life.

Living in the shebeen house was my mom's uncle, his two sons, their children and wives, and his daughter's children - nine people. Both my aunties were petrol attendants. It was a three room house where my mom's uncle was sleeping in the bedroom and my other uncle and his wife were sleeping in the lounge. Outside, there was a squatter house at the back where my aunt, who was supposed to look after me, was sleeping. The kitchen is where the whole shebeen thing was happening; where they were serving drinks. That's where I was supposed to sleep. So I would not sleep some days. After a while I started to be really sick.

My mom didn't really see I was sick, I was not working right. It's the first time that we'd been together, so I was feeling really uneasy with the whole thing. Now I'm with totally strangers in a very strange place - everything was confusing. I came from Joburg to find my mother and find that she don't have a home, she's staying

with a boyfriend in a hostel. Can you imagine that? When you get here, you find this woman that you've been seeking and this home; you find it's not there.

I should have been defeated totally at that time because that was what I was longing for for the rest of my life! To have a mother that can look after me, that can teach me things. To have a home. When I got here, all my dreams should have been just shattered. My aunt was a shebeen woman, I should have just take beer and drink and be drunk. I should have just sell myself. But I refused that.

46

I tried to go to school in Mbekweni, at Simon Hebe Secondary School. I was starting to limp at that time. My leg was swollen and sore, I didn't know what caused it. When I talked about it to people, it's like it's a traditional thing that will be made by witchcraft to revenge a person. If someone wants to revenge on someone and you know where that person walks in the mornings, they will put some mixture of medicine. If you stamp over it, you will be sick forever unless you find another witch doctor that can be able to cure that and take it out of you.

It was very a hurtful time of my life, with the whole thing of being sick. The township people knew me as Ncombasa, which means snail foot. I was so labeled by this name, whatever that I do. Even the teachers were calling me that. I couldn't concentrate at school. I hated walking. I hated moving from a desk. There will be punishment at the gate when you late. It can be just few minutes before I reach the gate and then they close the gate and I will be punished, though I'm slowly coming! I will be so mad. Sometimes I leave home very early, but when you walk in the townships, you come to this spot where there's flooding, especially in winter. So you have to turn the other side and I can't jump on anything.

Even children wouldn't want to be friends with me. They will be so worried to be labeled by me. It was like I'm a crazy person. I used to believe actually those children are so dumb or retarded in a way that they cannot see it's not something to laugh about. And they can't see behind my walking. I felt very much lonely. So I started school and I dropped school. I couldn't make it.

47

I came in Paarl and I had this wish of going to school. All my life, I wanted to be at home and go to school. Because of my leg, I couldn't go to school. I couldn't be a doctor, I couldn't be a nurse. My dreams that I had near the windmill on the farm -

I saw them fading. I'm not going to school and no doctor knows what is happening to my leg. And I don't have a home. What is there?

When I was sick, my mom will come and bring me Maheru; Maheru is a Xhosa drink. And she will take me to the witch doctors. One of the witch doctors said, "That's why this child is in pain – How can a child of this age never slept with a man? This child need a man in her life." Remember I was just fifteen years old. So my aunt was angry at this whole thing of the witch doctors, the Sangomas. She said, "You throw all his things away, Gertrude. What if he's giving you things that you're going to run around or not even be able to run around because you can't walk; what if you're going to call men to come and sleep with you? Throw away all these medicines. You're not going to drink these things." So my mother tried her way of believing how to be cured.

I did not want to stay in the shebeen anymore. I came to the point of wanting to be with my mom, of wanting to talk to her. When you stay with other people as a child, you don't have a chance to talk to your mom. If you want to talk to her, it's like you're talking bad about those other people. I was just tired of being in that situation the rest of my life. It was the same thing in Dodrecht on the farm. Even if she comes, I could not talk to her because I'll feel guilty and those people will want to know what did I say to her. So I decided to follow her.

48

My mom will always bring Maheru on Saturdays in the morning before going to work in Paarl. So I knew she was coming and I was already ready to follow her. I followed my mom as she was walking - a huge distance that I can see her but she must not see me. I was wearing slippers because no shoes could fit me. My leg was very swelling; it's winter, it's raining. I'm wet, my feet are wet and I'm having a pain. But I followed her a distance. She took a taxi and then I took the very next one. She got out and I got out. Luckily the way to her work was very straight, when she takes a turn, it was just one turn. When I got to the corner, she was just about to get in the house. So I nearly missed her.

After a while I was coming close to the house because I was walking slowly. I got in and I knock. A woman came and opened the door. She's got tea in her hand. And she's like, "No, osi, no food, no job, nie werk nie."

I was like, "I'm not looking for a job."

She looked at me and she said, "What do you want?"

I said, "I'm Jane's daughter."

She said, "Jane's daughter? Jane!" And Jane came, which is my mom.

My mom was like, "Oh no. How can you do this to me?" She was furious. And I could not understand.

49

That first day, Julie and I, we clicked. Julie was my mom's boss. Her parents were in Johannesburg, they were not far from Krugersdorp because they were Indians, so I knew about that place. We will talk about Johannesburg and about school and about the farm and about Mbekweni. She was just a very nice person and she didn't work. She said, "You must come again, come again, we will go to town." Then I started going there almost every day.

When Julie started driving, we were driving together. And I will always say to her she wanted to kill me. Because if she mess up anything, we were going to die. So we got so close to each other and, when I was with Julie, she will give me clothes. She will say, "Fit in this one, do you like it?" And then we got it. So that's how Julie and I got used to each other.

After a while, I found out why my mom was furious about me following her to work, it's because she never told Julie that she had 8 children. Julie knew that she had 2 children and she knew about my youngest brother. She automatically assumed it was me and my half brother, that we're my mom's children. One day, when I was used to Julie, I said, "Julie, do you know that we are eight?"

Julie was like, "No Gertrude, you must be making a mistake. Your mom has got two children."

I said "No. She's got eight children." My mom was so mad.

50

Julie wanted to know about my leg and she and her husband took me to doctors - Muslims and whites. They didn't know what's wrong with me. The only thing one doctor told them, that I will never have a child. I will never. They were suspecting that my womb will need to be taken out in the early age. They didn't believe I will ever have periods.

Julie took me to Tigerburg Hospital. I had seven operations in my leg and still, the doctors believed I will never have children. I was in Tigerburg Hospital for months, but they didn't come up with any answer to say what is the problem.

When I came out, I didn't go to Julie's place. My mom knew I'm talking so much to Julie, I'm telling Julie everything truthfully and there's so many things that she was hiding from her. So she was not very happy with the situation. She arranged me, after being discharged, to go to Crossroads. Julie trusted my mom so much that she let my mom take this decision to get me in Crossroads after I leave the hospital. When I came out of hospital, it was December, round about the 15th of December. At that time, most people are leaving to go for holidays. My mother was one of the people that was leaving. I just got discharged and it was rush, rush around the hospital. I didn't have money for the taxi so I had to wait for a bus. It was getting very late and very scary. When I got in the bus finally, I went to my seat in crutches, the bus moves and I fell. This was one of the loneliest times in my life.

I got off the bus and I had to walk to Crossroads - there's no streets, there's no light. It was just a huge squatter area with no lights. It was the shock of my life. Even back in the farm, when you've got a small house, it's builded of clay, it's builded of something. Crossroads was huge and full of shacks, houses build of every type of a thing. I walked forever to find my way to get to those people, to the place my mom arranged. When I got there, they'd left for holidays as well. They left the key with the neighbors.

So, I'm alone in this squatter house. I asked the neighbor's child, I think he was about 5, 6 years old, to go and buy me a cold Lemon Twist and brown bread. I took that brown bread and I put it next to the bed and I slept there on the bed. I couldn't move because now I have bled so much using the feet for this long walk. And I couldn't stop thinking of how my mom was standing in my way of finding a family. I couldn't call Julie because there was no phone and I didn't want to bother her over the holidays.

After two or three days, a guy who's related to this family, came to check if the house is still okay. He opened the door and I screamed to him. He came and found me there. Lying next to me there was a pail that I keep on using to pee. This guy was more like my age, and cute. But he couldn't even look at me as a girl. I totally don't think I was attractive to him. I was so embarrassed to ask him to go and throw my pee somewhere.

After he left, I was praying to God to protect me because that door was not secure. Anyone could have get in. But I also believed that the situation I'm in is somehow a punishment from God. It was like, that mixed feeling about God, "You punishing me, but please, help me, protect me, I trust you."

I was very angry at my mom for leaving me in Crossroads. I was angry at my mom for everything. From the first day in Cape Town, she isolated me immediately. She got me to stay with aunt in Mbekweni and she didn't give them money for me staying there. My mom was wanting to manipulate the Xhosa culture that says, "If my child goes to you, it's your child too. So I don't have to pay." She knew better than that, she knew people in townships don't operate that way. They operate on budgets - you have to pay everything. It's not a farm, it's not a rural area. She knew both cultures but she was still enforcing the Xhosa culture where it suit her. So I was angry at that. I think that's why I followed her to Julie's to begin with. Now, in Crossroads, it was worse. She had me trapped. My time in Crossroads was terrible. I was so sick with this leg. I felt very isolated, staying with totally strangers. My mom would not come and visit, I think she visited me three times that year. If she came, she's just coming to those people, promising them she's going to bring some money for them, which she never did. So I was very angry at her. Until this point, I wanted to believe she will come right. Now I started to see what kind of a person my mom really is.

I stayed in Crossroads huge months, if not a year. At that time, I didn't see Julie. When I moved out, I went back to stay with my aunt in the shebeen in Mbekweni.

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I don't know if you can see where this is going. A short while after that, I was tempted to try to kill myself.

I was at my aunt's place in Mbekweni. I was alone at that time. Everybody in the morning wakes up and go to work - I was the only sort of a teenage and I couldn't go to school. Their house was very careless. I told you earlier it was a shebeen. There were any type of poison that was found there.

That particular day, I was under pain. I was seeing my dreams fading away. And I couldn't stop dreaming. The dreams were still there. I still plan my little plans, "When I'm out of this one, I'm going to do this." I couldn't stop dreaming. That's why I know even if you under any difficult situations, you never stop dreaming. But those dreams are the most hurting because you feel you can't do anything about them and still you dream and you dream. That's why I always think people need to be given a chance to build their self-esteem and to do something. Because if I stop acting on my dreams and I'm staying next to a person that is achieving her dreams, and I can't achieve mine because of my circumstances, I'll definitely steal from that

person - I will be jealous of that person. So I was frustrated about not being able to succeed my dreams and I was sick. I decided to make a shortcut and kill myself. I mixed everything that I knew it was a poison in front of me. I didn't worry about the red poison or yellow poison, but anything that I knew it was a poison - I mixed tablets, I mixed Ratex, I mixed just about everything. I didn't want to have a slow death.

What is nice is that I already counted my clothes. I knew I had a red track suit that was very nice with white words in front. That one, I knew it has to go to my sister, Nomvume. But the other things as well, I had one pair of jean, so I wanted them to go to her. But I did not write these things down, it was like someone will have to know this one must go to Nomvume.

And I could see my funeral. I knew who was going to cry. I didn't think my mother will really cry. In the sense, I was giving her a totally gap or a space in her life. It was gonna be minus one out of eight children, so minus a huge problem. I knew she was going to cry, but at the same time, I knew it was gonna be a relief. Surely people will say to her, "It's better than being sick all the time." And she's also going to say, "It, it was the way that God wanted." So I was settled with her. I knew my aunt will be very hurt, but at the same time, I was taking a problem away from them. And I knew Julie will be mad. But also, I was not their child. You know, I was not their responsibility. They care so much about me, but there's a lot of people that they will care for when I'm gone. And I knew my sisters would be very hurt. Though they did not stay with me for a long time in life, we were sisters and I was still writing letters to them.

I knew my funeral is not gonna be big because my mother don't have money. No one has got money to have a big funeral. So it was going to just be a short and well and peaceful thing. And I will be finally with my angel.

So I mixed all my poisons and I was ready to drink. But I think God was there. Definitely my angel was there. But when I decided to kill myself, I just forgot about my angel for a while. Ali, after I finished mixing everything, my granddad showed up. Actually, he was my mother's uncle but in Xhosa tradition, that is a granddad too.

So my mom's uncle showed up around about 12:00. He was just angry that people are leaving things careless. I was just staring at this old man. "Why is he here?" I was totally confused. "This time of the day, why is he here?" And I was shaking, of course. I was really terrified because he was going to be angry if he knew what was

happening. The house was untidy and he started picking up everything that was around there, including my mixture. And he just throw it the sink. So I did not succeed to kill myself

After that, I told myself in a way that amaze me that I'm not going to fall, I'm not going to be defeated. I was still sick - I couldn't go to school. But I kept on reading books, even if it's the Bible, to refresh my mind. Who was there to make me do that? Nobody was there to make me do that. It's hard for me to say I did not have people to teach me. But I did not have people to concentrate on developing this child. They were not my mothers, they were not my parents. They did not have to make sure everything happened. If it comes in their mind or I come across anything, they will tell me, "That's wrong." "That's right." "You must be like that." But Ali, if a child is not yours and you do not adopt that child as your child, you don't pay attention on the child's really upraising. That child has to help her or himself, then you feel you can help that child.

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In 1980 I went back to school, but I failed my grade 10. When I heard my results that I failed, I refused to make excuses of, "But Gertrude, most of the year, you didn't go to school because you were sick, you were in hospital. But, it's because there was lot of boycotts. But, but, but." I blamed myself for that year. Julie said, "But baby, you were sick." I was crying and I refused anything that they were telling me. That is a time I can say I fought not to be destroyed. It was like a waking up and saying, "This is your life. Your mother is not there to do anything for you. You have to stand in this life and be strong."

I can remember Julie saying, "How can you want to kill yourself? We love you." I don't think I wanted to try it again because I stayed more to Julie afterwards. She could see I was not used to the township. She could hear and see that. Julie and them wanted to build a house for my mom at the back; they really did like her. My mom is a very alive person, so I can see why they did like her. But my mom wanted to stay with the boyfriend. So Julie said I rather come and stay there. So I stayed in the servant's quarter, where my mom should have been staying. And bathing in the house.

At Julie's place I was more cared for, it was more a home. She will buy clothes for me, she will buy books to read, she will tell me, "When you doing grade 12, you will be this; when you finish, you do that." So I had a huge reason to live and I was encouraged all the time being with Julie. In this time of my life, I believe and I feel

God as very much loving, I can't even say understanding, I just believe God's got a way of protecting you. You walking a walk that is already planned by God.

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Julie was another world to me. The township life was new, the Cape Town life was new, the culture of all these was very new and different. But with Julie, I began to learn about coloured and the segregation. First I thought Julie was white. Then I discovered that she was Muslim. I did not know the difference between Muslim and Hindu because I only discovered Indians in Johannesburg. So I knew she's some part of Indian but not Indians with the dot in the middle of the forehead, she's not Hindu. I was also introduced to a wealthy life in more like a family. I was already introduced to a wealthy life with the Parker family in Johannesburg; I knew of a wealthy life with that Brown family on the farm, but it was at a distance. It was just for them, far from me. Now I was in this house where I can bathe with the family in the same bath and I can eat from the same plates.

One Saturday I just came from my part time job; I was doing the petrol attending at Engen in Paarl. I got home and Julie's like, "Oh, sweetie, are you hungry?" She said, "Let's go and buy Kentucky Fried Chicken before Dr. Jamie came." And we went. It was smelling so grand, you know, beautiful. When we got home, she put butter in this Kentucky. I couldn't wait to eat that meat. It was hot. And nice and fatty and everything. So they gave me my piece.

I had my piece! I had a piece that was mine, a huge piece. I gasped, "Oh gosh, it's mine. They gave me this." She dished for four of us - her older daughter, her husband and herself. They wanted me to sit with them at the table, of course. They used to say, "Come, it's okay." And I'll say no. I went to eat outside. In my life, besides my granddad's house, whenever I'm with these families, I will go and eat outside. Somehow, something in me just wanted to give them a chance to be a family.

I ate this Kentucky. Oh gosh, it was such a nice feeling. The most feeling, I think it was like - it's mine - it's my meat to eat. And it's such a nice thing, I would think it's for really rich people. So I ate it with my bread. After that, they were going to Julie's in-laws. So I was going to stay alone in the house, which I did love.

When they left, I noticed they left this chicken skin for the dog. I was like, "They leave this meat for a dog?" I said to Skippy, "As from now, you're not going to have Kentucky. I'm the one who's having Kentucky. You're a dog, you're going to eat

bones." And I ate all those chicken skins, I ate everything that they left and I went to give the dog bones. That was my introduction to Kentucky.

54

That December, New Year's Eve, I was in Mbekweni at my aunt's shebeen, for the Christmas holidays. I was sitting in my uncle's old car in Mbekweni and praying. First, as I'm sitting in the car I'm playing the radio. A lot of children that I knew that were in Mbekweni, in the township, they're walking up and down with their boyfriends hand in hand, people are waiting to cheer the New Year, they're drunk, it's just noisy. I'm sitting in the car, I cannot walk properly, I don't have a boyfriend, no friend want to stick around me and I don't have friends. Who wants to walk with a slow person? So I'm sitting there and I'm like, "God, I cannot understand why is this happening to me. If I have done anything bad to you, please forgive me." And all this time, I was always thinking I've done something bad by leaving the farm, the Dodrecht farm. So I was asking if I'd done anything, "Please help me, this year I must walk. This year I want to have somebody who loves me too. I want to walk like those girls that I was seeing there holding hand in hand with their boyfriends."

My life in Cape Town was boring, but quite a process of learning. I was trying to fit in so very much in various areas, in the totally shift of three lives that I was living. In my mind I was still in the rural areas and then I was living in the township sometimes and then also with the wealth of Julie.

There were so many things I could not do because it was interfering with my culture, with my understanding. I was not available for social things in the townships in very very way. I knew when you come from school, you come straight, you go and clean in the house, you prepare food. When you're done, you do your homework. In the evenings, you make people tea. Whereas the children in township, they were so amazed with the way I do things. "Oh you ibhari," they say. Ibhari's a person who's naïve, who's not thinking like a township person. It's more like you're thinking the tribal way of the rural areas. I still feel that way in many ways.

People in the rural areas called people in townships tsotsi - they're very suspicious of them. So the whole suspicion was in my mind. I was ignorant about the township life; it was very unfamiliar to me - even the accent of people in the township versus the people in Dodrecht, the rural people. I knew according the church, that you're not supposed to have sex before marriage. But the girls that I was around, I knew that they're having sex. They will talk about when they go out with their boys in a

group to have sex, everybody all in one room. They all in one room and when they go in to sleep with their boys in this room, everybody look to see the names of your brands. When they take off their shoes, a boy has to be so proud of the brand of his girlfriend's shoes and a girl has to be proud of her boyfriend's shoes. They will tell me how they take off their clothes, the bras and the nighties that they were wearing, expensive quality nighties. There's a competition all the time to have the best brands.

So I was very much defeated in the township. I was defeated by the understanding of it. I was defeated because they knew I'm coming from the rural areas. My language was not the language of a child growing up in the township. I was not known in the township. People in the township become like a family, a network gets to be there. I was not related to a township culture or a township family. I was always not feeling I belong. I was also longing to have friends, I was longing for a boyfriend who I won't be suspicious about, who'll talk sense to me, who won't scare me, who won't have this tsotsi accent.

55

Later in that year, in July, I was walking slowly from school to the station and I saw this guy talking with a girl that I knew. I didn't know him, but I was so captured by his hands. As he was talking using his hands, I was like, "Gosh, that's a damn attractive man." I was thinking maybe he's coloured because he was really looking like coloured. But I look and I could feel how my body, the reaction on my body, my heart was like, "Oh, those hands, if that man can ever touch me." It's like I could feel him holding me and touching me and they will be warm hands. His hands were very attractive to me at a distance, the first day I saw him. Not knowing who he is. But at this point I didn't have hope that there's any guy that would be interested on me. I was not thinking a lot about dating or anything, because of my situation of being called Ncombasa and also I was sick. I lost courage. So that wipe off my mind; I saw the guy and it's over - I don't know where he lives.

Not very long after that, on Saturday night, I walk my cousin to the hostel where her boyfriend was staying. The boyfriend's wife was there and so a fight started, it was a huge, huge fight.

I went looking for the police; I knew there are policemen who live in the hostel and I knew where they stayed, so I went looking on the two houses where the police stayed. I find this guy with the nice hands alone in this place! I had a huge shock of

my life. I didn't know what to say. I tried to speak Afrikaans to him and he continued speaking Afrikaans. I couldn't speak it fluently. I tried to speak good and he made like he didn't hear me. I tried to speak English to him and he still fool me like he doesn't understand English. I was walking with him, trying to explain everything that happened. Only when we got to the place where there was the fight, he started to say in Xhosa, "I want everyone on the other side and I want this one on this side and I'm a police." And then I was shocked, "Can he speak Xhosa?" All the way, I thought he didn't speak Xhosa. I'm just attracted to him, very much attracted. But I know I'm nothing compared to this guy. And the girls that were around, they stand, they're not limping, they don't have a funny name like Ncombasa, so surely he's attracted to them. After this day, I could only think about him more. His name was Boy.

Chapter 5

In a way of friendship

56

At that time I was mostly staying at Julie's and going to the township for school. The reason why she took me to a township school, she let me know. "Gertrude, I want you to know what happens in townships, and I want you to know there's a huge difference between our education as Indian people and you as black people. There's a difference between the white education and us as Indian. According to apartheid, blacks are lower than everybody." She wanted me to know, just for a year, that I see the schools for blacks. I'm glad she did that because otherwise I would have looked at black people, at my people, as they are stupid today. When I worked for the paint industry, there was three guys there: the other one was a coloured, the other one was a black guy and there was a white woman. They were all taking orders. The black guy had grade 12 and the others had lower grades. But he was the one that was most suffering to do the job because his grade 12 is like the coloured guy's grade 10 and his grade 12 is like a white person's grade 8. So if I did not have to go to school in Mbekweni, I wouldn't have been able to check that. After I finished that year, Julie sent me to a coloured school in Elsie's Rivier.

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In the year when I was in Mbekweni, the school was going to go to Durban - from the Eastern Cape to Durban - taking a tour in June. And I told Julie. I was still really limping, but my class teacher told me I was going to go too. Julie was excited that I was looking forward to go. She said, "Don't worry, we will buy clothes for you." I knew I'm going to have the best clothes. More than anyone can ever think of. But at school, the girls will talk about what they bought for this trip, panties and sexy stuff. And what they stole. These children were talking about what they stole and I'm like, "I think this stealing thing is easy, if they can steal so many things. I'm going to steal all what I know I'm going to want." I didn't need anything, Ali. If I needed bras, I could have had bras. These girls were having these beautiful sexy bras but they were bigger girls in a way, they were having sex. I'm like, "Oh I want that," and I know Julie's going to say it's unnecessary. So I listened to them. One day, I went alone to town for a check up from my doctor. On my way back I was wandering around and thought I should try stealing now that I'm alone. When

you're going to steal, you must be there in a busy time. Stupid me, I went in a quiet time when the shops are about to close. So it's really quiet. I stole a panty hose. Ali, you should know, I did not need these things. And I was stealing cheaper panty hose as compared to what I'm having at Julie's. But just for surviving that and stealing and being able to fit in with the group, I did it. I wanted not to be looked at like I'm dumb, I'm from the traditional areas. You really want to settle in somehow. But anyway, I stole these panty hose and I stole a panty and I survived the first shop. I left.

Then I went to Ackerman's and I stole three things and I was caught. I was shaking. This guy took me to the back. They said, "What are you doing? Look at you, you're so beautiful, look at your smile. Why would you steal? We know you stay at Dr. Jamie's." It was worse. "And we're going to call them and tell them you're here, they must come and get you."

They called the manager and this guy was like, "I'm taking you to jail or Dr. Jamie - choose." I was shaking and crying. I took everything out and showed them everything I stole. It was the worst day of my life. They ask why I stole things and I told them exactle what is happening. I told them, "The school is going to Durban and I wanted to have these things, so then when Julie buys me things, I can say 'I don't need that.' That way, I'll have more money." I told them the whole plan. They were like, "Look at you, you can't even really lie, you're telling everything." It was coloured and white around me. And remember this was very scary to me because it's a new race and they were speaking mostly Afrikaans. Only when they talk to me, they will talk in English. They made me to feel very embarrassed. They were not rude at me but they just made me to understand that I am so much more important than a few panties. They said, "How many times have you stolen?" And I said it's the first time.

They said, "Really it's your first time if you steal this time of day, you know the shops are quiet this time. People that steals can never do that."

The manager said to me in a hard voice, "Go! I never want to see you in my shop. If you put your feet here again, I'm taking you to jail." And for me, the only thing was like, "Please don't call Julie. Don't call Julie."

They never called Julie, but I didn't wait long. I told Julie. She was so mad at me and she was mad at the teachers because they said they don't think I'm going to be able to go to Durban on the trip. I was still sick and children are going to be rushing, I'm going to be frustrated, I can't keep up with them. She said, "My sweetie, you

must never lie. Because I can just see it when you lie. I always know when you're keeping something from me." We went to go and apologize to those people again. They were like, "You must never do that," and they were laughing. But I was not laughing. I never went back to Ackermann's in Paarl. Never.

58

A few weeks later, I got a message from the man with the nice hands. He arranged to meet with me while I was visiting in Mbekweni one weekend and then we were talking just as friends. He ask what was happening with my leg and I explain. I could walk very very little, but very sore. He came and he said to me, he's got this church and he would like me to go. If I want, he can come and pick me up (he was using the police car) and take me to this church in Kraaifontein.

We went one night to this church, he got me to be prayed over. The guy that was praying over me was a coloured pastor, and he said to me, "Put down your feet." My feet wouldn't go down, it was like there was a magnet that was happening with the ground. If I tried to put my feet on the ground, I would be like jumping, shaking by itself. So he said again, "Put your feet down." I was scared to put my feet down. I knew I'm going to be sore and this thing is going to happen. The first time, it happened. The second time, my feet stopped jumping up and down. The third time, he said, "Stamp your feet." I stamp my feet a little bit and it was sore, but not that sore as I thought it was going to be. He said, "Stamp your feet," and I stamped my feet, I stamped my feet! Then he said, "Start walking." And I walk around, I walk around twice! The pain was gone!

The following day, I woke up not believing that I can walk. For the first time since I arrived in Cape Town, I can walk properly. I stood up and I went to the bathroom. I just was amazing. When I get out of the bathroom, my uncle, my granddad and my aunt were busy drinking tea. They were so surprised. They were like, "You can walk!" I explained to them about the praying thing and everything. They didn't believe that, they were suspicious of it. I said, "I'm also suspicious of it, but it happened!"

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Julie was worried for me, being friends with a policeman. It was that time when people who stayed around policemen were seen as informers, and they were necklaced. Do you know what is necklaced? When they put a tire around your neck

and spray you with petrol and light a match. But Boy knew it was dangerous for me. He was very careful.

She knew I liked Boy as a person, but she knew it was going to be very hard to be friends with a policeman and especially if we start to date, she find it very hard for me. I think she was wondering how do we talk, the two of us, how are the conversations. She also understood I was ignorant in terms of politics, I couldn't challenge Boy that much. He will be the one who's overpowering me because he knew better than I do. Boy grew up in Cape Town from when he was nine, he grew up at his foster parents'. Whereas I, at that time, I was battling my way from the farm.

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For something like four or five years, Boy was being my friend. We didn't talk very much about social issues when we're together. I think we were talking mostly about schools, about our dreams, we were talking about where we come from really, about family stuff and he will talk about his grandmom. For me, what was very important, was to talk about family stuff. I was not very much a person who will talk about what is happening around, I didn't know much about what was happening around.

He was a person that was very much in his place when he's not working, so if I find him in his place, he will help me with my homework, especially Afrikaans and Maths. He will be telling me about the church and his friends and make jokes. I was starting to love this man but I could see he didn't want a relationship with me. He treated me like his younger sister.

Boy grew up a lot like me, without a really home. I loved to hear his stories because I wasn't the only one who grew up with a sadness, wanting to have a true family. One night, he told me about his foster family. Here are his stories.

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I was still very young – I don't know what age was it because due to certain reasons in our culture, you can't ask your mother, who's not there close to you, lot of questions. But I know that my father left us while I was a very small baby. In our family I've got two elder brothers and a sister, so I was the baby, the youngest of them all. After my father left, we moved into my grandfather's house where we stay and we grew up.

When I was six years old, my grandfather died. So due to the fact he died, there was no extra income at home. My elder brother was forced to leave school and work at a

butchery. There were nights that we have to sleep eating only chicken intestines. They throw it away at that butchery and then my brother pick it up in a plastic bag and bring it home. And then, with the money that he earned at that butchery, he could send my other brother and my sister to school.

Then at the age of nine, I was still not at school, so my mother sent me to her uncle. His only kid was a daughter and he said he will raise me. My family are black, pure black, but my uncle married a coloured woman. She was coloured and he was black, but then they raised their only daughter as a coloured. Many times, they shout at me calling me kaffir, forgetting that their father is also a kaffir.

Okay, he was my uncle and he was nice, he was a domini in the charismatic church, but there were certain things that happened that really didn't make me happy. When I was in grade 5, that foster mother, my uncle's wife, forced me out of school because she said her daughter only passed grade 5. For three years, she could not pass grade 5 and she was forced to get out of school and do work. Now she also wanted me to leave school at grade 5 because she said her daughter leave school at grade 5. Why must I go further?

She went to the shop where her daughter was working and talked to the owner of the shop to give me a job. He was nice enough, he gave me a job. But he said he can only give me a job for weekends and also during school holidays because he found out that I'm a very intelligent boy and that I can go far in life, he wanted me to go to school. That's where I started to struggle. I was forced to give the money I earned at the shop to my uncle's wife as it is and she wouldn't give me any pocket money or things like that. After the school holiday, I went to school against their will. They didn't want to pay me my school fees, they didn't want to pay my books.

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I met a friend of mine who had a similar problem. He also is raised by strange people because his mother throw him away. So we became friends because we know how to struggle both of us. Thomas was not working and I was lucky with the work. When I used to work weekends at the shop, I used to steal money from the till. Because I was scared to steal, I wouldn't steal big sums of money. The amount that I steal was a twenty rand. Then when he came to the shop, I gave the money to him. Thomas was a lucky gambler at that age – I think he was also 13, 14 years old – and then he take that money and go to his friends and they gamble. Sometimes, they double up the money and then when he was lucky to double up the money, we

replace what we stole from the till. Then we share the money so we could buy books or whatever is needed at school and we pay our school fees. Sometimes when he lose that week, we're out, we'll just be hanging around having nothing.

Then we also make provisions for the day when we don't have money. When we have money enough, we'll buy some peanut butter and jam and hide it somewhere at the school yard under tree trunks and we'll buy a whole loaf of bread because sometimes it happens that when we go home, they don't give us food – especial my family. They don't give me food to eat so I have to prepare for the next day for food. And then we buy for a week – we used to buy two loaves of bread. Then at lunchtime, we go to that secret place of ours and take out the peanut butter, jam and the bread. Sometimes there are some hohas in the bread because it's hidden outside, under a tree trunk, so you just shake the hohas away and put the peanut butter and jam on the bread with your finger and we eat. And after we snack, we jump out of the hiding place and go and play with the other kids. We never shared our feelings or our problems with other kids. They always see us happy and under no circumstances we want them to know that we were struggling in life.

I once told my mother I was unhappy and she was very upset. So then I told her not to be upset because at least now she don't have a lot of kids to look after. There was nothing she could do.

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While I was still at school, after the main quarrels that I forced myself to go to school, after my aunt said I must not go to school, I woke up in the middle of the night and she was busy choking me. I don't know why. Luckily I was fit enough because the kind of job they give me, going to the bush to chop wood and carrying heavy tree trunks to bring them home. I was very strong for my age. I managed to push her away from me and then jump up and stand to one side. And many people ask, why didn't I scream while she was doing that? But what if my uncle should have stand up there and find her trying to kill me? Then the whole family would be upside down.

Because that uncle of mine and his wife were Coloured, I learned to speak Afrikaans in their house because they're only speaking Afrikaans at home. So after I left school in grade 10, I go to look for a job. I try all over, many places, but because I was a black at that stage - I'm still a black person but at that time, when you are a black person it's difficult for you to get a job. Only coloureds could easily get a job. I

went to several places with that friend of mine Thomas and another guy. We went into this garage and asked for a job. What they did, when they suspect you that you are a black, then someone will come behind you and scare you. If you shout, “Yo!” then they say, “Oh, only kaffirs shout like that.” But if you don’t shout, “Yo!” then you pass as a coloured. Due to those kind of interviews, I lose the job.

Then I went to a place, Coro Brick. I first sit down there the whole day and watch them how they take people in. I found out when you coloured, they will accept you, but if you have a Xhosa name or African name, then they won’t accept you. The following day, I went back to Coro Brick and I told them my name is Boy and my surname is Smith and then, due to that, they gave me a job and I started to work for Coro Brick for two years. But I work only as Boy Smith for a year and a half. After I get a promotion as a supervisor, I realized that they really need me because I’m the only one that can work with the group of people there. I’m the only supervisor that all the people like in the company. People will always run away from their supervisors and come to work under my group of workers, my team. At this company, there was a lot of black people working and they also had a supervisor there, a black guy, but he knew nothing about Afrikaans. The manager will ask him to translate to the black people because he was always worried about the production. At Coro Brick, there’s certain way of you must touch a wet brick so that you can have a good quality brick. If you grab it too hard with your full hand, the edge of that brick is going to be skew and they have to sell those bricks as rejects, not for expensive. This poor guy always say to these people when he translate it, “Now, my friends, you heard what the baas said, he was speaking in front of you. All of you were here, all of you got ears and you heard what he said.” But most of those people don’t even understand a word of Afrikaans. That’s one of the things that really touches me. Then one day while he was busy interpreting, I said, “Okay, let me help you. I’ll interpret to those people today.” And then that’s why even the managers like me because after I do the interpretation to those people, the people were doing the things that the manager want them to do. Now they have the full message whereas in the past, they didn’t have the full message because this guy didn’t interpret what the manager was saying. As I said, due to certain things like that, that makes me see the company really needs me. And if they find out I’m a black, they won’t chase me away.

Then I go back to him and say, “Listen, my man, I am not Boy Smith, I am Tetile Sgwentu.” When I told this to him, he nearly fall off his chair and he say, “How dare

you do that to me? How am I going to explain to the administration and those people that I employed you for so long and now I’m going to them to organize the papers for you to work here at this company?”

I said, “Okay, it’s up to you. You can chase me away or you give me my job.”

He also informed me, “Listen, if we change your surname and your name now, one thing you have to remember: your money is going to drop.”

I said, “Okay, I don’t care about the money as long as you know the truth that I’m not Boy Smith, I’m Tetile Sgwentu.” But company people do have contacts at the Bantu Administration Board. The Bantu Administration Board is the board where all the blacks were forced to go and register there. But it was difficult to go and register there if you don’t have money. You must have money to register. So then I was registered as a black person at the Bantu Administration Board so I can be a legal worker at Coro Brick. Since then, I work as Tetile Sgwentu until I made the application to join the police force, that was in 1982.

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Before I wanted to become a policeman, I wanted to become a teacher, because I like working with the community or with people, helping people. I wanted to work with deaf children, but there were no jobs like that in the black community. So, due to circumstances, I become a policeman. In the old South Africa, it was a little bit sad because even my own family didn’t accept me as part of the family member because they still see me as a sell-out. They can’t get it over their hearts. Especial when, after I joined the force, they recruited me to become the so-called security branch member and that was more worse. Because in the old South Africa, if you a member of the security branch, they really hate you. They don’t even want you close to them. So, it was bad because I have to sacrifice my job or my family. So I decided the best is to sacrifice my family rather than sitting, doing nothing or joining them doing all those illegal things. My family never supported me in my decisions.

It’s a nice job to do because you are there for the community. And whether the people see the old security branch as a bad part of the police, I don’t see it as a bad part of the police because, at that stage, we were there to protect our country. The people, who they called terrorists in those days, were out not only to attack we as cops or the soldiers, but they also attacking civilians, innocent civilians. So, I’m proud to be a part of a team that was fighting for the safety of our country. No

matter if they call me a sell-out, but I was proud to do that. Due to the sources that I've got, that I recruited in those days, I have recovered a lot of arms, firearms and some hand grenades, which I believe, should have been used to innocent people. So, I save a lot of innocent peoples' lives.

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The first time I saw Gertrude, it was in the afternoon when I came from work. I saw her standing with a friend of mine, Norman, a old classmate and then I make inquiries from this guy, "Who's that girlie you were standing with?" He explain to me she's also a grade 10 kid in the same school, Simon Hebe. I said, "But I'd like to meet her."

Then one day, about two weeks after that, there was a rent boycott in Mbegweni. Some of the teachers were arrested because they were also a part of that toyi toyi or protest march. Because I was a cop and because the people I work with trust me very well when they have to walk among a lot of blacks, I was there with this one white guy, a colleague of mine, to take photos of the march. If anything could happen, I was the one that was there to protect him. Right in front of the line, I saw the friend of mine, this old classmate of mine, Norman. And next to him, there was this little girl. That day, I saw her again for the second time. I thought, "Now is the bad time to talk to her because if I can approach her now, there will be problems. They will see her as a sell-out, talking with a cop." Then I make sure that I find out from the others where she stays. A week after that, I met her and I told her that I want to see her and then we had a chance to chat, tell her who am I and to know her more. Since that day, we met each other.

66

When Boy and I were together, we loved to talk about family things. I didn't think about him being a policeman. Although, being a policeman was a glamorous thing in the township. For people that are political, he was the enemy, but for the others, dating a policeman was a big thing. For me it was contradicting because at this point, I'm with Julie and Julie was political, she will never get her daughter to date a policeman. When I fell in love with Boy, I didn't like his job, but mostly I didn't have strong opinions. It was the first time that I was dealing with a savvy way of looking at things. My mindset of the farm was slowly getting out, I was starting to know about politics, learning about the struggle, and then I met Boy. I fell in love

with Boy as for Boy. Except for photos, I never saw him in uniform. So it could not be registered in my mind he's a policeman. I fell in love with this guy that was wonderful soft, soft guy, really loving, with big hands.

So I fell in love with that guy but whenever we talk about our lives as a student and as a policeman, I will be so much irritated with him. He was very much negative about many things in politics, many politicians. In my mind, he was very much brainwashed. He was negative about people who were in the struggle. It was justified in some ways. The children of activists were not in the township schools where they can be distracted. But the activists were supporting the children that were boycotting schools in townships. So in a way they know their children are growing somewhere educationally and they abusing other children for the cause of the struggle. So that was Boy's way to look at some of the things. But I was getting annoyed that he would not see beyond that. He will see the student activists as they were cruel and they're a bad influence. I hated that word, "They're a bad influence." Remember, at this point, I don't know much about politics. But the little that I knew, I knew he was not seeing the whole picture. And I saw him as brainwashed. He was very much running to Christianity, running to the Bible. He will justify everything by saying, "God does this. Look at these children, they're wasting their time when they're toyi toying and you must be careful not to waste your time as well. And they're sleeping with the teachers." Which was reality. The students that were very much activists, some of the girls, were really much sleeping with the teachers, were used by teachers. But the boys were very much smarter than that. Most of these boys that I was with at school, left for exile. So he will say, "Look, it's not just politics, it's more like they want it to look like they went out to do some politic thing, but they're just going for a nice time." He will say all those things. And he was older and he was working. And for me, I was looking at him only on my side. But I was very much annoyed with his mindset, especially around politics.

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After finishing my grade 12, I went to Johannesburg for a training as a nurse. I can't really tell you about my life there because I didn't stay long. I got sick and I came back. Boy was supposed to be waiting for me according the way of dating. He was very much strictly Christian as he was raised in the house of the domini at his church. Before I left, we were sort of dating, but not having sex together - kissing and all that. I knew that he's this person who will not have sex before marriage

because it's wrong in the eyes of God. But when I came back from Johannesburg, my friends came and told me - Boy is having this beautiful girl, Nomsisi, and she dresses so smart. She was beautiful and tiny and she was Pamming her hair. When the Pam came from America, a lot of people were Pamming their hair. But my hair was natural. I was still very much in mindset of culture, from the rural area mindset. When I got back to Cape Town, Boy said to me, "Don't hear anything anyone tells you; it's a lie."

And I'm like, "Oh? What is this?"

He said, "They're going to tell you things and don't believe them."

I was very disappointed and I said to him, "Don't be angry at them for your mistakes. Listen. Boy, I love you and I respect you but I want you to be happy. To be happy loving means to be happy. You let a person be happy when you love a person. You in love with Nomsisi or whatever, it's got nothing to do with me, it's okay." Though I was really disappointed and very hurt, I came to a point of telling myself that this is what he wants. It's his choice and it's within his powers to do whatever he want to do. I said, "In this township, people don't know me. And you're not going to come and introduce me in this low way. If you choose to be a boyfriend with these type of girls, it's your life, go on, but just put me aside of it, I don't want to be involved with such a life. I don't want to be known in this way. And I don't need you to introduce me to people. You're choosing this life."

He was concerned about it and he apologized. I said to him, "Anything that we thought we're developing, it's over. I do not want you to be my boyfriend and I know you don't want me to be your girlfriend. Don't think you want me. Don't feel forced or pressurized, don't feel sorry for me." So from that, we were starting to quarrel. We had this huge quarrel with a week where I totally didn't want to be around him. We agree we're going to be separating and see if we love each other. So when I come from school, I will try not to pass where he can see me because I'll feel like I'm reminding him of me. And then the following week we'll try this hide and seek, not talking, not trying to do anything that keeps us in contact. He tried to get his friend Norman to mediate. Norman did love Boy as his friend and he did love me. I think he saw us as a good couple as well.

Norman did some mediation that Boy and I end up meeting one day. We were not angry at each other, but we were not happy as we usually were. Boy said he really want to talk to me. Boy really knew me. And because I loved him, he had his way of getting me soft. He told me he loved me and he broke up with that girl Nomsisi. He

said he doesn't see any other girl and he would love, one day, maybe we can get married. But he would never make promises, Boy don't make promises.

Then we planned to have sex. It was not accidental, we agree on that. We planned to have sex. And on the day we had sex, that was the first day I had my period. I was twenty-one years old.

Chapter 6

You not alone

68

When I fell pregnant, I feel like I'm a failure. I felt like, "How can I bring a child to this world? I don't have weapons or means to raise this child the way I would want to and I still wanted to do so much for myself." I still wanted to be educated.

Julie was very very disappointed. When I told her, I was in Groote Schuur after I'd been told I was pregnant - she was the first person I called, before I even called Boy. She was like, "I did notice you're round." But for her, I think there was some relief because the doctors said I would never have children and also I didn't have my period before I started having sex with Boy, so in a way it's like, "She's getting healed, she's healing."

She asked, "Did they tell you how long?"

And I said, "Three months." I was very punishing myself. She didn't make me feel punished, she didn't make me feel I'm not welcome. I felt like I was embarrassed to go to her house, I started disappearing. Slowly I would go and get my clothes from her.

When I told Boy I'm pregnant, Boy said he knew. He's been saying to me I must go to the doctors. Boy said, "How do you feel about it?"

I said, "I'm mad." I was in Rosebank House College doing nursing, here in Mowbray. I was working towards my dream.

In a way, that was a manipulation - if Boy knew he was making me pregnant, he was manipulating me to get out of his family. Because he wanted so much to get out of his family. And he loves me and he knew they not going to accept me.

69

Boy and I's relationship was hard, it was very hard from the beginning. We loved each other so much, but he was not allowed to go out with a girl outside his church, his foster parents' church, because any child that does not go to that congregation is a sinner. Boy's foster parents had a girl that was like 8 years older than Boy they wanted Boy to marry. And Boy's foster mom, with this girl, they have already bought pots, everything ready for when they got married. Boy didn't want to marry this girl, was not in love with the girl and he just let them do whatever that they were doing and all this time we were dating.

So even when we were going out, we were not supposed to be seen by anyone who was related to that church because if anyone find out, then he's going to be cut off in the church, not get communion or participate in certain things because he's going out with a girl. Now that I'm pregnant, definitely they going to know that he's sleeping with me and totally that's against the Bible, against their religion belief. So it was hard. We were hiding everything. The church was the enemy to our relationship.

70

Traditionally, when you're pregnant, your family has to take you one night to the family of your boyfriend to negotiate lobola or if there's any plans that this guy want to marry you. In my case that did not happen. It was a difficult situation for me because my mom was trying to make that happen so she could get the money, but Boy's family couldn't know about me. I didn't know where does Boy live, where does he stay. I knew his family's in Stellenbosch in Kuli North but I never been to his home. I loved Boy, I trusted what he's saying. But I also knew the tradition and if I'm fighting my tradition, it was like I'm not proud of whom I am traditionally. I was going against my culture. But anyway, I stopped my mom and my mom's brother-in-law when they wanted to take me to Boy's family. I said, "No, we can't do that. I don't want that." They were very mad. My sisters and my brothers hated that. It was like here's this girl who my mom educated - they believed my mom educated me. Now I'm totally controlling her if I say she can't take me to Boy's people, which means she can't have lobola.

But then what Boy did, he got a guy from the Eastern Cape that he knew from when he used to work in Coro Brick and got him to come and negotiate lobola without Boy's family. Boy and he made an appointment with my mom. He said he knows that he impregnated me and he's planning to marry me. So now we sitting with Boy's commitment, not knowing his family, not knowing where he really lives, where he comes from and everything. Culturally, it's not balancing, there's no dignity really in it.

I can't be seen in public with this guy, he's worried about his church people, he's worried that if he can be seen with me and people tell his foster parents, they might destruct anything for us to ever get married. He started by looking at houses, places he can buy, and funny things were not happening right at all, he was just having a struggle and struggle.

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When I started moving slowly from Julie, I started to think, “Where do I go then? Because I can’t stay with my aunt.” I went to look for my mom at that point of time and she was staying with a family in New Crossroads, where they got proper houses. The Swedish government builded houses for people there. I went to look for her there and these people told me she’s got a plot in the Old Crossroads. When we found out about the plot, we told her we going to help her. My sister and I will build a home on that plot.

I moved out of Julie’s because I was pregnant and because I was feeling embarrassed that I was pregnant. I didn’t want her to say, “You can’t stay with me anymore.” I initiated that and I did that step. Boy also thought it’s unfair for me to stay at Julie’s after she did so much for me. I was really cold towards Julie. Julie was not cold towards me. I was miserable about what happened. “How can I fall pregnant? How can I not finish what I wanted all my life?” I felt that failure, I really felt it.

72

When I look back on that feeling of failure, I just can't believe how many girls have been in this situation because they not educated. Look at how many women today that don't understand their bodies. Many women don't understand why are they having periods, they don't understand why does period stop, they don't understand why they got angry sometimes. They don't understand why period comes in times. There are retired doctors, there are nurses that have retired, who have the time that they can just share with other human beings. We shouldn't have scarce counselors here in South Africa – there are people that are sitting with their skills as social workers, as doctors, account keepers, as professional beings and they don't do anything about it. I believe if we can start looking at sharing in terms of that, we won't stay moaning about what happened in the past. We will be really working towards healing the past, towards moving forward. How do we move forward? We need other people to use their lights, to give us a chance to find our own way by using their lights into our lives.

When I look at people that are today educated – do I feel jealous or not? Does it make me angry or not? No, I bless those that are educated. I just wish they can

share. I wish they can just share their knowledge, their experience, their education with others.

73

Julie was renovating her place so there was a lot of material to build a shack house from what she was throwing away. Julie’s builder would ask his boys to load some other stuff and come and drop it for us at the entrance of Crossroads. Nobody could drive in Crossroads because people were very scared of Crossroads. There was a lot of burning of cars happening and sometimes people will just try to get in Crossroads and then people will hijack them.

We builded this house shack and it was a small kitchen, a small lounge and two rooms. It was lovely. Boy came to help us and make it nice. We enjoy doing it, but we will be tired and hands will be spoiled because we didn't really know how to use hammer and all this stuff. We burned going to the trash, looking for some other material things like carpet, to look for Nevlon for the floors. We will be looking for boxes because mostly companies and people from suburbs are throwing their things in the trash. Some will find materials. You get a lot of stuff there, you pick up plants. We were carrying some building materials in a taxi and it was embarrassing because people are looking at these girls carrying boxes, for instance, pieces of wood. But it was fun. They ask, “How do you carry this?” When you get out of the taxi, you must put them on your head, and you pregnant at the time.

If you have pick up something that you not using, then you give it to the neighbor, to someone that is building her other place because there were people also building. We were not the only young people that were in that problem.

The house was finish about December when I was six months pregnant. But it’s very hard to think a shack is really finished. People always say if you building a shack house, it’s never finish. It’s a lifetime building because when the wind shows up, you have to rebuild again. When it’s raining, you’re starting to see waterfalls.

So I was now stuck in Crossroads. I went to Julie one day but the way they looking at me, I think they were very disappointed. I felt like, “I shouldn’t have been here.” I introduced Boy to them. They found him nice, but they didn’t like his job. They actually told me, they worried he’s going to dominate my thinking. He’s going to hurt me in the long run. And they worried about my children’s future as well because they said I’m going to struggle to get married to a policeman. They used to say, “These people don’t think, other people are thinking for them. They just

robots.” And at the time, I did not think like that, but when I was married after a year, I think I started to see it clearly.

74

So I stayed in Crossroads and Boy will visit me. He was staying with his foster parents, so visiting there was shut. Only when he’s got a chance to run away from his foster parents, he will come and visit me in Crossroads. But it was dangerous for Boy to go to Crossroads, he’s a policeman. If he can be caught and found out he’s a policeman, the people will kill him. It was always a tension, a scary moment. If we’re outside Crossroads, we’re worried about his church people; if we’re in Crossroads, we worry because he’s a policeman and all these things.

My sister was four months behind in our pregnancies. I started to get sick, I started to swell, I started vomit, I started not to be able to pass urine sometimes as the time was getting close. So we decided to get my eldest sister from Dodrecht to come up and to be able to help us both. We knew my sister wanted to leave her husband to come to Cape Town. So I wrote her a letter. I gave the letter to the taxis that were going to Dodrecht and I send half the money of a ticket. I asked Boy for the money. I did not say, “Come to Cape Town.” I said if she want to, she must come. If she does not, she can take the money and use it for whatever that she need. After a week or two weeks, she showed up with a baby and her two daughters. I’m nearly to give birth, there’s my sister that is also just four months behind. We had quite a houseful.

In this house, we don’t have really someone who’s supporting us financially, but Boy was supporting me. All this time as we were building the shack, the house, I was selling coal and charging a Rand per coal, so people were buying that a lot.

It was nice to stay with my sisters. I never really had time like that with my family, so I enjoyed that part. Not very long though, my brother Moses came. He is the eldest brother, the second oldest child, that left school to go to the mines in the age of fifteen. At the time, he really did love me and love us all because he actually went to the mines for the youngest ones to study or to go to school.

Also my sister, the eldest one, got married to the guy that she didn’t love to pay back my grandparents for raising us. I can say they have sold their futures for us, the two of them. She was paid lobola and he went to the mines.

75

But when my brother came to Crossroads, immediately he was not okay with me. One day my two sisters and myself and our neighbors were sitting and he came and he ask for food and all the other things. This day, my brother was very up and down and trying to pick up any fight or anything. He asked for food and I told him, “We just ate, I just cleaned the dishes and there’s no other food. There is no money to cook all the time, you should have been there in time to eat.” We didn’t know he’s coming because sometimes he doesn’t sleep there.

He said I must not tell him what to do and when to do it and he said, “I’ll kick you and you’ll give birth with your mouth.” He was definitely angry. He said I’m the only one that is educated in the family. “Don’t think your education can give you control over my life.”

Just the night before that, I heard my two sisters talking about, “She is the one that is got education amongst us.” Which was quite stupid because I was not educated that much, I just had grade 12 and I was still struggling to be educated. But I understood because he left grade 5 and my other sister left school in grade 6 and Nomvume, when she fell pregnant, she was doing grade 7. Themkosi left school in grade 9. So maybe they could have said I’m educated, but it was a big mistake because my mother did not give money for me to go to school.

I work hard for my education and Julie supported me and many many people. They didn’t really know my journey, my struggle because they just met this sister and now she’s sort of like famous, she’s going out with a policeman, she’s pregnant with a policeman’s child. Life started to turn at that time and I started not to understand my sisters, I started to be lonely. I started to be careful not to share much with them. There were other people that will come and visit us, so I made my house clean. I knew the guys that knows me will come and visit me and I did not want anyone to come find me below a level that they can imagine. I did not want them to find me losing the battle because at that time I was thinking, “I’m losing the battle of surviving. I’m one of the people that really the enemy has succeeded to destroy.” So, each and every opportunity that I had to better the situation, I will use it.

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My sister started to see I’m really having problems with my pregnancy and she will call the elder people that were staying around us to just come and check if I’m okay.

People will come and pray for me not to die with the pregnancy and Boy will try to show up, but it was now harder as Crossroads was starting to get more dangerous. He couldn't come with a car. Whenever you need to go out of Crossroads, you have to walk and at the time, I was having problems to walk. It's not just a short distance, it's very long.

I got in hospital and I was admitted to stay for a while. Again, I was lonely. The only people that I knew cared so much more than anything else, it was Julie and Boy. I made a commitment to my baby that day that I will definitely look after her. I was confused about everything: What is my really last name? What is my really clan name? Who is really my father? How to get hold of him, how to talk to him? Who will be my child's granddad? I made a promise right there that I will look after my baby.

I don't want my children to be raised by anyone else, rather than me. I would not want what happened to me. Though I'm strong today, I can do things, I hope God did not plan their lives to be similar to what I went through. I would not want anyone to go through that.

77

On the day I was ready to give birth, I got picked up by a ambulance that will pick up a person in the morning from other side of coloured areas and go to another one and go to another one, and came to pick me up. I think I was the third or fourth person. Remember, these women are having pains of some differences, but two of them were pregnant women too. And this ambulance has to go with a routine, doesn't matter how fast the pain is. Then we had to go and pick up someone in another coloured township and we went to go and pick up a person in Langa. We got at the hospital in Groote Schuur about 2:00.

We got in this small room for taking our temperatures; we were mostly first mothers. There's this young woman, she was from the Eastern Cape. She was just really in pain. There were some others that were in that pain of giving birth. I was in pain, but not like my baby wanted to come. I needed attention, but I could see me being me, always putting others in front, I could see people that needed attention more.

This guy starts talking. It's a older white doctor, middle age, I think he was on his fifties, this guy. He's like, "Look at you, your life is already gone." I can just remember some of the words that he said. "Why don't you go and toyi-toyi? Look at

what you're doing. This is our country. You are in our hands. Right now, you're in my hands. Right now, there's nothing that you can do, I'm the one that can help you out. You're young, you're destroying your lives, you're bringing children to life that you can't even handle your own lives, you're bringing children in here. You're going to die." And he's talking about how people are being killed in shootings. It's a midst of riots, in Crossroads, in all over, it's just shootings, on newspapers, the news, on radios and so on.

Ali, he is on top of the world. Damn. When I think about the doctors that I've been to in my life, I look at that. Totally, I'm in this guy's hand, totally I'm powerless. It's the first time I'm having a child, it's the first time we're having children. I didn't know anything about it. I'm here totally for him to help my life and my child's life. And he's telling me all this. And he was on top of the world. This other woman lost her child through that. I don't think she heard anything; two of them were really really seriously in pain; they're going on and he's talking. I said, "Please, can you just look at this woman?" I felt like I can't be quiet anymore. And he's like looking at me. And he was going on just so relaxed and giving us a lecture about superiority of how we are nothing, how we are powerless in the hands of a white person. And he was right at that moment. He was so right.

78

It's so hard for me to work under a white person. I went through too much. That man was so much in my eyes. But that guy made me to say, "My child is not going to do that." It pushed me. He was telling us about how stupid we are, about how our generation is going to stay slaves, how we should have been at school. He was right, we should have been at school. It was so relevant things. He thought he had power, but he was unlocking some of the things in our brains. I don't know how the others took it, but he made me feel so mad about being there. He made me to feel like, "Damn, I'm going to do it. I'm going to show this guy or his son, it doesn't matter, we know each other or we don't, I'm going to do it. And my daughter is going to do it. I'm going to do it in behalf of those women, I'm going to do it for us. I knew I have to do something. After that birth, I have to do something. So he drove me to a corner, he really drove me into a corner of in my life.

I got a caesar. Something was just wrong. I remember the older women had their normal birth. In that group of that day, most of us had a caesar. And my baby was delayed. I think if he acted as a doctor immediately, I could have maybe had lesser

problems and these women also could have had lesser problems. I hate that guy, I'm angry, I resent that guy for what he did to those two women. I just hate that. They were so traumatized in a time that they were powerless more than I could ever be. I could walk out and open the door; they couldn't. They just needed him to help them.

79

Before any beautiful thing is born, there's always little little things that will always try to stand on your way not to come, to get that thing beautiful, to really work to see the fruit of this beautiful thing. Because when you pregnant, you start to not want to eat, the child is not going to have the nice energy, the fruit or anything. You're going to say, "I can't eat," and the child is not fed. It's a fight. Somehow, it's God teaching you and the child that this is a long walk, baby. This is life. You are about to be born, you are about to give birth to life that you found here.

But you have to struggle to eat though you don't feel like eating. Or maybe if you overeat, you might spoil this child, so you have to say, "I'm not going to overeat." And you're going to feel the kicks. The child is kicking now, you can't turn over if you are lying. Because you protecting this thing. If you turn over, you might spoil this thing and you might also be hurt. So in all these things, God is teaching us, "You not alone." You were born, Ali, by your mother. Your mother was with you. All the time, your mother is with you. Till you die, your mother is with you. You were conceived in her. And she struggle with you trying to protect you and at the same time, you protected her. Because if you die in her tummy, she is also in danger. So you are two. Always in life, you not alone. I got scared when people say, "It's my life." Somehow it's never really just your life. Somehow there are other people's lives. It's a chain, it's a net. Life is a net. I got worried when people forgetting about those little things, that nice feeling, mad feeling of an unborn child. And they forgot about the changes in their bodies. Your breasts suddenly itch, you got fat, you look smart. The changes, it's the seasons that you go through when you pregnant. And why did God chose all these seasons for a woman? Why did he chose that before a child is born, there must be blood? Why did he chose there must be a pain before a child is born? He could have chose that before you give birth you can just get in the feet and take out the baby. Though you love this child, you know you going to have a pain, but you can't wait for this child. There must be blood, there must be pain, there must be struggle, there must be prepare, you prepare! Even Jesus was born in a stable, but there was a preparation there. Why after this you feel

like you're so tired? So many seasons in one's life from the conceived moment. And a woman is part and parcel of that. You can't escape it.

80

Evelyn was born on Tuesday, 1986, the 22nd of April. Ali, I came out of hospital with a baby that I treasure so much, I want to do the best for this child. I remember my first looks in Evelyn, I was so in love with my child. I feel like I've grown up with Evelyn in my life. It was so hard to bring a child in life with no means to raise that child and wanting to raise her in a very very good way. I felt like I'm not an example at all to the girls in the farm. I'm not an example like, "She ran away and she succeeded." I always knew I got this leading thing in my life, so I'm chosen for some part, as everyone is chosen. I knew, I wanted to play my role. But when I brought the child in this world, I was feeling, "I'm just like one of these girls that just get pregnant in any age - what is the difference?" And I love my child so much, I knew I'm leaving everything that I had ever wanted for me to raise this child now, my life is totally so divided. I swore that I'm going to make sure that she owns 60% of my life now, I'm raising my child in a good way. Firstly I wanted her to be in a healthy place. I was so bothered at that time when Evelina was born, it was just riot, in that month, April, 1986, it was just fighting around Cape Town, in South Africa. Boy came to fetch me from Groote Schuur Hospital. On our way, they call him to say he must be in Stellenbosch as soon as possible. So he just drop me outside Crossroads.

Can you believe this? I got a operation on my tummy underneath. I got a baby that is few days, maybe three days, on my arms, it's shooting in Crossroads. And the enemy that is shooting me is using the father of my child against me. He has to drop me there with his child and stand with the enemy. Oh gosh, do people know what we went through as police wives? He did not stay with me in Crossroads, he will just come and visit me and maybe sleep over. It was a shooting, 1986, it was terrible, oh it was a distraction. Many people died in Crossroads. Next to my house, the whole family died. I don't know why they didn't shoot right through our shack. After that, I stayed in other places, in other zinc houses in other areas because many people left Crossroads.

Evelyn has been my miracle, my reason to fight for life. She fought for life.

81

After that whole thing of Crossroads, the fight of 1986, we stayed in many different places, hiding from Boy's family and from the violence. First, Evelyn and I and my sister jumped over the dead bodies in Crossroads and then we stayed a little bit with my aunt in New Crossroads. Then some neighbors owned a shebeen in Elsie's River and so we ask him if I can rent a room there because I totally refused to go back to Crossroads. I didn't want to stay in a squatter house with my child; I was aware of the TB that you pick up in a squatter house.

We stayed all over. First we stayed in that shebeen with loud music and scary people for the whole winter. We spent two weeks looking after a place in Khayelitsha. Then Boy rented a room for us in a place in Muizenburg where there was white people staying. I was cleaning the house with Evelyn as the way of paying the rent. We stayed there for two months until the house was bought by people from overseas. Then we moved back in with my mom and sisters, this time in a tent in Harare.

Boy was supporting the whole family. If I used the money that Boy was giving me to feed me and Evelyn, I would never have stayed without money, but I was feeding the whole family. The tension was really big this time. My sisters thought my mom chose to educate me and, look at me now, I'm like a white person, I don't go to family things and I got this special thing with Evelyn.

I was really all over Evelyn. I want my child to eat the healthy things, I don't want my child to crawl on the sand, I find it it's dirty, it's unhealthy. So it was like they find I was western. I had time that I just didn't want to talk, I just want to read books. I hated a noise, I didn't like when there will be dancing and parties, I didn't go to those things. I loved calm, to be quiet. So they were picking up on all those things. Also, I'm the child that was suspected of not being their father's child. So it makes suspicion around me.

I wanted to leave all this behind me. I was just tired of all these talks around me. When I was getting married to Boy, I just knew I will be out of that, it will be my choice to go back to it, to go and visit them and to do that. So that was the freedom that I was looking for.

Also I knew I was going to live in a proper house, not in a squatter house; so my child won't be having sicknesses like TB. That was that security that I knew I was going to have. What I was looking forward to in marrying Boy was the freedom. Free from my mom, free from my family, free from so many things, just to be at my own; to know that it's my house. I think I also wanted to build something towards

my life. I mean like knowing that if I got money, if I buy a chair, it's building towards something.

82

When Evelyn was eight months old, that's the first time Boy brought his uncle to come and see Evelyn. And this guy attacked my mom now. He said traditionally the really Xhosa would not do this, you can't wait until the child is 8 months old to meet the mother. I was supposed to be introduced to them - the latest is the third month of your pregnancy. He said to Boy they going to come and pay me R500 that I stay away from Boy and he can marry the coloured girl. Because that's all I needed, I needed money, I'm poor. And they're not poor. So Boy was furious with that. Boy said, "No uncle, I'm the one who said they must not come because I had my reason for that." So he was strong, though it was not a normal situation, he was coming on through. After that, Evelyn got so sick.

She was sick because they said she took the poison that I had on my leg, on my womb when I couldn't walk. She took that when she was born. She was allergic of everything, I couldn't breastfeed her - she didn't drink breast milk. I was more worried to lose my child, I didn't have Boy every time to support me, he was trying to support me financially. He was doing part time jobs that his uncle don't know about it because, otherwise, his salary was going straight to his uncle. He had no say over his money. So he was supporting me by doing all the part time jobs after work. So that was a big struggle and I didn't want to ask anything from Julie. And my sisters and brothers were having this friction between us.

So Evelyn was growing and being a very sick child. I was looking for work as a domestic worker as well, to be able to have a healthy place to stay with my child. But unluckily, or luckily, I didn't have that. I didn't end up being hired by anyone really. Boy started to have plans.

83

One day Boy came to get me to fit in a ring. He could not go to places where he might be seen, so he went to Strand on Saturday morning and we had to quickly go to these places, and he was looking nobody must see us and then we fit in this engagement ring. Finally he bought it. So that day was the engagement, my engagement. A week after that, we got married. That day when we were getting married, he said his foster mom tried so hard to hold him not to come to pick me up

when we were going to get married. They really wanted him to get married to this girl that they already picked for him.

We got married that year, 1987, in May. The 21st of May is my anniversary. Evelyn was just a year and nearly one month when we got married. We got married the two of us and the people around in our wedding was the magistrate, three police guys, the woman from Boy's office who was making tea, and her sister. That was the only people that were there. Thomas, Boy's friend, borrowed us a car. We drove around to Paarl and we went to see Julie; Evelyn was with my sister in Kayelitsha. Then we got back and I had to go to Boy's family. I was so scared.

At Boy's house, there was this pastor who had to give me ugulaya. He was telling me I must know where a woman belongs, belongs to a kitchen and has to listen to the husband. When he was doing it to Boy, he was telling him it's okay to beat a woman when she doesn't listen and everything. And he's a pastor of the church! I was like "Shit, man." But I was sitting there as a really obeying child. I was thinking, "If this marriage is going to work, we're going to have to stay away from those people." But for the time being, we lived with them. So those were my challenges, my early challenges of my marriage.

84

When I met Boy, he couldn't really speak English. He was just Afrikaans, Afrikaans, Afrikaans and I hated Afrikaans. Ali, it was like I had to protect my daughter in Afrikaans. And how do I do that? I'm totally completely under Boy's hand. I have to obey my husband in so many many things. It was totally the change of my life because we move in with his foster parents.

I was supposed to say 'Baba,' but I refused that one. I called him 'love' and 'Boy' when I'm mad or when I just disagree on things. But Evelyn was forced to say 'Baba' to her dad. I hated that one, but I did not make a move immediately.

Whenever Boy speak Afrikaans I see him as a police in my mind. Because of my experiences of when I was in Krugersdorp, being detained, and because of my experience, whenever we will be terrorized by police at school and everything, there will be always that Afrikaans around that. And I think when I started to get to know the difference of Afrikaans and English and the white race and coloured, I related Afrikaans with just politics. So I hated that. It drove me nuts. I was going down, I

felt like the enemy was having hold on me and my children, like I was being a slave to the enemy.

I was worried to see my home language become Afrikaans slowly by slowly. And do I allow this or what do I do? Luckily they chased us away. We stayed just for three nights or four nights at Boy's foster parent's place. They chased me away because they did not want a kaffir in their house and they wanted a coloured woman.

85

We moved to a farm with this young baby Evelyn. The farm was terrible in Stellenbosch. I came from a place where there's lights all over and the farm is dark – black. I'm so scared at night. If I forgot the washing at six o'clock outside, I will only take it tomorrow morning. I don't want to go outside. In the same house where we stayed, there was a woman that was been bitten by a snake and she died. There was also a family that moved after their baby was bitten by a spider - he died too. Boy's family knew about that, but they did not let us know. Boy knew about it and he did not tell me that I must be careful. Instead, a few days after we move in, he started burning things around the house. Only when I questioned him, he told me he was burning things to get the snakes out. He said he did not tell me from the beginning because he had no other choice. He was worried I was going to be frustrated.

We move in on Thursday and on Friday night, Boy's family came to fetch him, that he must quickly come, they need him. Ali, I don't know if there's anyone that has ever been hated by people like that. They did not say a thing to me. And Boy, at the time, was still really listening to them. If they say this, he has to do it, otherwise, he's not blessed. God can never bless a child that does not listen to his parents. And they had hold on him because they made him feel guilty that they look after him from nine years old. So he will always try to repay them in a way.

Ali, they knew people died in this house. And they took Boy to a concert in Mfaleni which is far, for that whole night! He came home about 4:00 in the morning. I said, "Boy, did you marry me to just kill me? Because anyone can just come and kill me and my daughter!" It was not a safe house, Ali. It was not a proper door - anyone can just kick the door and they in. And there's no window, we just got boxes in the window. There's no proper cover that was there. I was mad about that one. I really

told Boy, "I think I must just go home. I don't want you to kill me here with your people." He was apologizing and everything. He felt so bad.

But that was not the last one. Many, many things like that were happening and they will just come and call him, he must go and do this and he's gone. I'm alone at home. And he has to take his uncle here and there for preaching and not just for preaching, for going to other people to gossip, man, to sit there and gossip. It was a low, low life to me. But I was also confused because they were using a lot of God, God, God. So, I couldn't really say, "Don't do this." I was also scared not to be blessed by God or to be killed by God. It was totally against everything I had learned in life. My self-esteem, my integrity was pressed down, was challenged like anything.

But we moved, in November we moved to Strand and we lived in a flat.

Chapter 7

Love's got a root

86

When we got married, I didn't get most of the freedom that I thought of, especially around money. Boy was supporting his mom in the Eastern Cape, he was earning so little, we were struggling right through. But when we got married, we had pride. And Julie was helping us with furniture. And we were buying second hand things and we were selling fish - we were just trying trying trying slowly slowly. The financial freedom, we didn't have it really. I always think maybe because we started with a child and we started with nothing really, it was a huge struggle.

Julie was very helpful to me, she bought most of the clothes for Evelyn, if not everything. She loved Evelyn so much. She loved me, Julie loves me. If I talk to Julie on the phone, she knows exactle I'm not okay. She'll say, "Baby I know you're not okay. Behind that love, there's a cry - tell me what is wrong." So she is wonderful. I was this young mom and we were dressed smart and expensive - my baby was having all these expensive clothes because of Julie.

When I gave birth to Evelyn, Julie was really there. Julie did not want to see me looking poor, I don't think she could bear looking at me poor. Even if I bought something, I would always buy things that were cheaper than what she bought. And she will say, "You don't have to buy things - you know you must just tell me what you need." Or she'll say, "Okay, now I understand, you're bigger, it's hard for you to just say this is what you need, but just have a way of just showing me you need something. Save the money that you have."

87

When we go to Boy's church, I always feel like I'm having a pain in my heart. I was having headaches. It was always like, "Oh, I so wish we cannot go there." Boy was very much taken up by his church. He believed God lived there, he really did. He believed his foster dad and all those people that were deacons in the church, they were a little Jesus.

One day in church there was this woman that was a prophet from Kraaifontein, a coloured woman named Delila. She will prophesize all these things about us - with other people as well, but mostly we were in the talk of the air. She said Boy is going to be in the wheel chair because God is not satisfied with him because he married a

sinner and she will say in a deep voice, "His children are going to go and beg in the street,' says the Lord." She used to say, "Hallelujah." And everybody's going to be quiet and say "Amen." And she say, "Hallelujah." Then she'll say, "The Lord is talking, the Lord is not satisfied. 'Brother Boy, Brother Boy, Brother Boy. The Lord is not happy with you,' says the Lord. You married a sinner. He's disappointed in you. He's going to show you he's the God of all."

It's like it's real when it happens and everybody's quiet and they just keep on saying "Amen. Amen."

"The Lord says there's going to be an accident soon. Two cars will hit your car, your car will be in the middle. You're going to be walking with a wheelchair." She gave this prophecy on Sunday and then that happened exactle that way on Wednesday. I just said, "Boy, I know my God. My God does not hurt people. My God that I know from the farm is not like that. He will not hurt me. And my God will never say I'm a sinner."

It was very hard because as much as Boy and I, we were so close to each other, but when it comes to that church, he was totally different. So this was a life like other people don't live in. For me in a church situation, things like that can't happen. When you choose a church, you choose a church so that you will be protected. So I hated that it was so much confusion and also with politics. Boy was in this power, he grew up in this power, in the power of pleasing those people from the home, the power of pleasing people in the church. He has to be a good boy and a good brother and all that in the church.

I couldn't tell my mom about it, I was not close to my mom. Julie was Muslim. And she was another person, she will just say, "That's bullshit, leave this." She won't identify my problem. My sisters would not relate to that.

In the church, I couldn't have friends because nobody wanted to be aligned with me, to be labeled by Boy's wife who's arrogant and at the same time, who's a sinner.

88

Slowly people did speak to me. I think because I was outcast, they knew they could relate to me. The first woman I ever counsel was from Boy's church. She was from King Williamstown and her marriage was arranged. The guy that she was married to was dumb, a really weak weak guy. And she was not a weak person but I think the situation has forced her to be in that level. She will always come and say to me, "But, how can you be so strong?" She started slowly to try to come close to me. One day,

she came to me in the week and she told me about how her marriage was arranged. She told me that her husband can't have children and also there was a problem with her sex life, but she did not directly say that. She was hurt and empty. I don't know if she wanted to commit to her marriage as a person, but she was sure it would be wrong for God to divorce. But I think mostly her Gods were those that were around her and those people that has arranged the marriage.

I said to her, "Oh – I'm going to talk to you something that is not right as a sister of the church, but I'll tell you this. You have to decide in life where you want to be. Because at the end of the day, it's you and if there is God – it's you and God. I don't believe God has created anyone to give your life for another person. I think the only person that came to give his life for us or for any other human being – is Jesus. And for you to stand for another person's happiness or to cover another person's weakness or something, it's just going to kill you and it's tearing you apart right now."

Before she got married with this guy, she had a child. And I think she was still longing or missing her ex-boyfriend and her life. She got married because it was like the way of saying sorry to her parents because she had a child before she was married with this other guy. He also paid lobola. I told her, "If your parents love you, they have to not accept, but forgive. I don't think they would love you to be hurt the rest of your life. Love is not something that you can just quickly take a dough and make it – love's got a root somehow.

God won't allow you to play God because he knows you can't handle it. And God does not want you to have other Gods. If you are doing things for me – for the brothers and daddies and pastors of the church, those people have become your God. When you listen to them, you shifting away from the umbrella and the sun start to burn you. Now you feeling the sun is burning you. The strongest winds are pushing you and you have no shade, no shield to cover those things. You should just seek God – not the God that I will tell you, not the God that everyone is telling you – not even maybe the God that the Bible is telling you. Just find your God. Say, "God, I want you to talk to me about this situation."

"I don't believe that God don't want you to love a man. I don't believe God want you to have a half sex. I think he want you to have the fullest. He is not a unfair God."

89

In the same church, there was Selena. She will also come to visit me in the Strand. She will tell me stories. You must remember – people don't just come and tell you

straight their problem. They will come and tell you slowly and then you talk a while. Once they start to know that they can trust you, they can tell and tell and tell.

Selena's husband was a police. And he beated her and undressed her in front of these other police like himself in the police station. It was the whole long awful story. And Selena came to me. I think she loved her husband – she did not want to leave him. I did not say she must leave her husband. I said, "Selena, I never come across your problem, I don't know how to deal with your problem – and your problem is your problem. I appreciate that you are older than me and you see that you can come and tell me. You took a taxi and a train to come and tell me this whole thing – I appreciate that. But unfortunately, I'm not going to give you advice as a sister or any holy advice. I'm going to give you advice as it comes in my mind. You must remember it's an advice – I'm not saying to you *must* do this. But as you telling me, it looks like it's over between you and your husband. Maybe you still holding on a commitment but it's not love anymore. Because I don't think you can love someone that does that to you. But I see you don't want to make people happy that did not want you to get married to your husband. You're just keeping that sort of like commitment to prove you can do this. So, it's for you to leave that marriage – it's really for you to leave the marriage. She told me her mother want her to leave the marriage. And I said to her, "Then you got a support. What is the better thing – that you got a child that see mommy being beaten by this man – by their dad, or you got children that you just take them and find life for them? If they want to go back to their dad one day, they will go back to their dad. So, I don't think it's working."

90

Boy was so much in this oppression of the church like these womens. The system was so much built in him. So my focus was on him to see this is a system that was surrounded of fear and I couldn't be in that particular system of fear. In South Africa or in the world, there are many systems that are built that people must fear. Especially I believe Christianity is very much a system that is built on fear. But this was more oppressing, the system that my husband was in. So my goal was for me to open his eyes to be out of this system. There was no any other church that was good for Boy.

Then he was also in the power of police. It was a huge struggle, it was a frustration ever since I got married to him. I didn't think it was going to be like that. I fought for my husband to be out of this, I fought for my children mostly. First I was confronted by Afrikaans, that he's Afrikaans tradition, he's raised by Afrikaans

coloured speaking people and cooked coloured food, culturally, by his foster parents. Second, the church thing is a coloured tradition with some Xhosa mixed in. Third, he was faced with police culture.

Boy believed the children will be good in a Afrikaans school; I hated it. So I had to fight that. I will be so annoyed. But I can't just say to him, "Shut up." I have to have a system of showing him each and every thing. At the beginning, I was getting mad, I will just get annoyed. But then I started to learn that getting mad is not helping me, it's not helping the situation.

The first thing that I knew was I had to have a strategy to get him out of the church because in the church, every manipulation was formed using God. So I had to get him to be out of it and to be able to look at it. That's why I believe that you can't be in a thing and be able to analyze it. If he got out of it, then he can start to see it clearly.

91

When Evelyn was a year and a half, I fell pregnant with Thania, the second baby we didn't plan for. At that time, we were living in the flat in Strand. It was very beautiful with wooden floors, two bedroom flat, a huge kitchen and a lounge, a bathroom - very very nice place. We got in there and we didn't have any furniture, I went downstairs - we were on the second floor - and I pick up bricks and then I builded a table in the lounge with bricks. Then I put a wood on top. I had clothes that I had from Julie so I made it nicely. And then after that we bought a television second hand black and white from a neighbor, we put it on top of that table.

I remember once I was pregnant with Thania and Boy had to go to church. There was no food and I'm pregnant. Evelyn and I sat in the corner in our flat where we lived and we were praying God for food. Not very long, a white guy, an Afrikaner guy, an older guy that used to work with Boy, came to the door. He brought a blanket and they brought a huge pot with food, with a lamb's leg and potatoes and everything in it and rice. I just could not believe it. This guy really loved Boy closely as his son. He used to work hand in hand with Boy for something like 2 or 3 years. He was Mr. Bachanach.

He was a very nice old guy. He got people that were living in a farm close to Stellenbosch and they were moving so they were selling some of their furniture. They were selling some things for two Rand, which is very cheap. He said Boy must go and choose what we needed and then he paid everything. We pay him back little

by little. So that's when we started having some furniture. He was always coming to our house. He's the one that gave us the machine washer.

92

Womens were coming to me all the time to talk about their problems. I think they could see I'm strong and I don't just do as the church say I must do. The first woman I worked with outside the church was Lindiwe, I met her by the post office. I think I'm around 23 years old. Lindiwe was so sweet girl and she was staying with her mom and her sister's two daughters. I ask about the two girls and she told me her sister died because people thought she was an informer of the police and they burned her to death at the time of necklacing. Lindiwe stayed with her children now and she was looking after them and her own mom. She did not have a job at that time. Her mom just had a operation of removing her womb when I met her. Slowly I got used to her and I told her she should finish her grade 12. She told me, "No, I can't," because of the problems that she don't have money.

I said to her, "Okay I will see what I can do. I will talk to my husband about that." I always see there's people that are selling second hand clothes in a box - a big box for R100. I told Boy about Lindiwe. I said I would love that we must buy these second hand clothes for Lindiwe. And we did.

Anyway, I'm pregnant with Thania and we don't have money. Really, we don't have money. But you could see that they were having less. So we'll buy these second hand clothes for Lindiwe. Boy said to me, "Take these things and put them in small boxes and give her one box and tell her you want ten Rand. Don't give her any huge box and ask her to pay the whole huge amount. Then you can see if she's a person to work with."

The following day, I went to her, to the flat where she lives. It was not far from our flat. I find, Ali, in this flat there was no water, they have to walk to go to the toilets, they have to go and ask other people for water and there were bunch of womens staying there. I think in Lindiwe's flat, there were like four or five families. Ooh, and I saw Lindiwe's mom. She was lying there after the operation.

You know, when you struggle - like you don't have money - and you see you got enough to help other people, it's hard not to help them. I started to say, "I got enough to help these people. I have to help these people somehow." And she showed me more people. They were still young, man. They were really young, these

guys. They were not younger than me, but they were young to do things – to prosper or to study or to do better things in life. I saw those that I think, “They can still do it.” I wanted to bring them their dreams.

I told them they must come to my flat and I’m going to show them what is inside that box. I was honest to say to them, I told them, “I bought this with a big box and I’m sharing that amount amongst you guys and I want you guys to make fifty Rand in this small box. Make that. When you come, pay my ten and come show me that you did make the forty Rand for yourself.” Some will do, some won’t do, that’s when you start to see who do you want to work with, who’s really taking responsibility from that.

So, from that, Lindiwe did go to school with the other group. I spoken to the Technikon in Strand and we got them there. I said, “These guys can’t afford all the books that you want. Can you try to get them books? What can we do? They want to study.” I sat for the grade 12 exam with them. You know, I did that exam three times - once for me, once with Boy and that time with Lindiwe and them. I think I just wanted to give them confidence to be there.

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When Thania was born in 1988, we were not in the medical aid because the police only covered black policeman, not their families. I remember when I gave birth to Thania, Ali, we were in debt to pay the hospital and we were sent to lawyers by the hospital and this guy will call Boy and come and negotiate with him how much he can pay, to give birth to his child! And he’s a policeman! Because he’s the only one that belongs to the medical aid, not me, not his children.

Not long after, times started getting tough. I started having pimples in my face, Thania was a baby now. She was crawling. Prophecies are just coming from the church, different ones, that there are evil spirits that are walking in our house, walking up and down. There will be a prophecy that they see Boy with hookers in the Beach Road, sleeping with them.

“Hallelujah! Wake up, wake up bra Boy, the Devil is on your toe,’ said the Lord. ‘I raise you and now you are doing bad things.’” Everything they say is punishment for marrying me. Some professes that the Lord is not happy so this marriage is going to stand for three years and then we will be divorced.

So all these things, I will just come home and pray to God. I was praying a lot. “I’m not going to be shaken by this, I’m not shaken by this.” It was very scary. I was

young - 23, 24, faced with these big mamas around me, with this God, this super human being that was threatening my life, but I still hold on on my God. I think I knew God generally is not what they’re saying but it was so convincing the way they’re saying it and there were things that were proving it like the accident.

One night, we sleeping. It was cold - I think it was about August, September. I felt something in the bed in the morning. It was a Saturday. When we woke up, Ali, it's worms - big worms all over in the bed. We're sleeping with a sheet under the duvet. We don't know how they get there. And we look at the floors, its worms, especially in the corners - and Thania is crawling and she's busy wanting to put them in her mouth.

Then when we make traditional drinks, amaherwu, the following day they are old. You know when you stir something and then it sticks to the spoon, it shows that it's old. Milk will be doing that. Amasi will be doing that. So there's nothing - if we leave food, the following day it's sour. We can't have leftovers.

We get everything that we can ever have to get rid of these worms. We asked the neighbors, because it's a flat - and they didn't have any worms. The caretaker of the flat was also a charismatic but in traditional churches, we call it Amazioni. It's Zionist, but not the Western one. He believed on mixing a couple of things with salt and then you spread it in the house, you take a brush and flick it. He was telling us to go to the spiritual sangomas.

Then we just stop. We said we're not going to do anything, we're going to pray to God. We prayed to God. We said, "Anything that we know about being clean, we did it. And we're not going to go and find any other help, we know you are our helper." So we were fasting and praying and just going on. Boy was just fasting, he was so thin, Ali, he was so thin thin thin. And praying.

It took almost like a month and then those things went away. When it was happening, everything just happened in the same time - the thing I was telling you about milk and the food and I was having so much pimples. At night, I was so scared, I wouldn't sleep. Evelyn will also be scared at night, so we were just praying. But this was happening and we were having other people that were willing to help us. We were getting introduced to other people, other Christian people, trying to help us. And we had food at this time whereas before that, it was a starving problem. So it was like you pass this test and then you go to another one. You conquer this one and then you go to another one. After a month of praying and fasting for God, the worms were out of there.

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So it was that struggle - I questioned God and I was standing very much alone on that. I was very much attacked by those new people in my life, mostly coloureds. I was faced with another side of Christianity that I didn't know, more charismatic, manipulating you with a Bible in the hand and people that were praising the white man. I came from the background of praising the white man, but then I got loose from that. So when I met Boy's church, I knew what they were doing. But now I had more weapons.

When the church people argue, I say to them, "Listen, not even my mom tells me what to do in my own house. This is my house. And you don't tell me about my husband, this is my husband. Don't tell me how to dress." Boy would not understand me when I do these things. He will say, "You don't talk like that to people, you don't do that." And sometimes I will be listening. But then when that thing strike, I'm totally me again, I strike back.

Boy was very confused in his life. I never said to Boy, "Choose that church or me." I remember what I said to him. I was like, "Go to church, but I'm not going to go. My god does not punish people, my god love people. I know a god that does not punish." I will say I'm not going to raise my children in this; I don't want my children to grow up knowing a god that punishes. So slowly, slowly, he was starting to look for other churches, and we pulled away from this church.

95

Then we had a struggle in our family now to get our children to schools and we were around Afrikaans speaking schools and Boy wanted to send Evelyn to Stellenbosch to a Afrikaans school. Oh, I hated that. I hated the history of Afrikaans. It was just a language that I hated in the core of my soul.

Boy thought Afrikaans was the good language. People around him were Afrikaans, the bosses' bosses were Afrikaans. He thought a child couldn't go anywhere in South Africa without Afrikaans. I listen to him speaking English today, it's amazing. He didn't think he can speak English. In Stellenbosch, Strand, those areas, if you speak English, they will say you making yourself better like you're a Cape Town person, so speaking English was labeled. People wanted to speak English I think, but it was like you think you're better than other people.

Julie could see this struggle. She used to say, "I knew, if you're getting married to a policeman, you're going to go through all these things." And she knew

we were financially struggling very much. But I think Boy didn't see beyond that, he was so much in the police force. So I was just getting through this stage and get to the other one and fight for another one. Evelyn did go to an Afrikaans speaking school for one year. After that, we changed them both to English schools. Now my struggle is to get him out of the police totally finally.

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Boy was looking after one of the Apartheid ministers, a coloured guy, and his daughter was singing for Libertas Choir. So whatever movement the ministers are doing, they have to have huge amounts of police around them, including their bodyguards. That is the money and that is the state cars. Today people are complaining about corruption, but look at that back then. Besides those security police that are watching him, the bodyguards are there, they're driving extra cars and they have to be paid that extra money of being there on Saturday. People have to compare what is corruption.

Anyway, the police are forced to be with the minister there because he is there to watch his eldest daughter who is singing in the choir. And the state has to pay their tickets to get in the concert. Libertas Choir was really associated with the apartheid regime. So Boy went to this concert and then he suggested that I try to get into Libertas Choir. Sometimes I can't believe I was involved with something so dominated with Afrikaners. But that is the kind of challenge I face all my life. That is how I became the multicultural me. Also, that was the first time that I slept in a hotel, with Libertas Choir - how can I not be involved?

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In my first concert, I was going to go with the Libertas choir to Joburg. Now, it was the first time that we are going to fly - I'm going to fly! What are we going to do in Joburg? The Libertas Choir is giving a big tour and we are going to be sleeping in these beautiful hotels and we are going to be sitting at these huge tables and we are going to use a fork and knife. And I don't know how to hold fork and knife. I can hold a knife with my right-hand hand, I can hold a fork with my right-hand hand and when you eat with these two things, you have to know how to handle them. What does my husband do? He said, "I'm going to cook and we're going to train for the whole month before you go in this." We started the biggest training. I wanted to do this because you must remember, people are looking at me - automatically they

think surely I know how to do this thing. And I don't know how to do it! At Julie's we never worried about these things. Even if Julie eat this way, I eat my way. I'm black, man, I grew up using a spoon or my hands when I eat things.

So Boy was teaching me. Ali, it was a struggle. I would try to cut whatever that must be cut and food was all over the table. We have to bring it back and I will just feel, "Oh gosh, I'm getting hungry, and I can't get the food in my mouth. I can't take this." But Boy was so wonderful. Especially when it comes to bones. I said to him, "No, but we can't do this when it's a meat with bones."

He's going to say to me, "But what if they dish you a bone? We have to try, that one will be worse." He came with a platter of cutting bread, to use a fork and knife for bread - that was a little bit okay. But when it comes to rice, I was a mess. So that was my husband's struggle to get me to be somewhere.

He also did teach me how to drink. He will say to me, you don't drink wine, you just take a sip. And if they pour wine for you, you must smell it sometimes. I still got a problem when you got different glasses - this shape is like this and this shape is like this. The thing is, I never pay attention on silly things like this. I will find myself using a wine glass for juice still today. But my husband gave me a good lesson on this. I failed it. He will tell me, "Love, you just take a sip, you don't take the whole thing." I look at everybody, and think, "Oh gosh, will I ever be able to do this?"

They're all forgetting they're drinking something. I can't. I'll just drink my wine or juice until I'm done with it.

Boy grew up with his aunt and uncle as foster parents. His aunt is a pitch black coloured woman and she's got all the culture of a coloured person. Coloured people have got the culture of Afrikaners. They use fork and knife at their houses, those that can afford that. But Boy learned about wine when he goes out with ministers, looking after them. Wine was not even coming close to Boy's uncle's house because he was the biggest holy man. Anything that was wine, they would not use. He learned that gradually when he was watching over the ministers. When I met him, I used to think, oh gosh, how can you love me? I learned many things from him.

Chapter 8

Life can turn you into many things

98

Only after 1990, we as a family started to be full in the Medical Aid. The day Mandela was released, I cried. We were around the Cape Flats and it came on over the radio. I said, "Boy – did you hear that!" I screamed and I was crying. It was just another thing. I wanted to see him. There were many talks, many changes, many releases of people. 1990 was one of the years that was more positive to the birth of South Africa.

Evelyn was born '86 and Thania was born '88. Siphos birth was totally different than the girls because we were full in the Medical Aid. Mandela came out of jail February 1990 and Siphos was born 92 May. In the hospital, there totally was a hope. There was more pretence from the white side towards us. There was more than just teeth, there was a shape of a smile from their cheeks. Whereas, before, they were just stiff. That gave me hope, Ali. I started to love things around the country. I started to listen to things, like rugby, the Springboks. I hated to hear about Springboks before that. I started to look at cricket because my son will be able to do this one day. I started wanting my country to win other countries when it's the World Cup whereas before I wanted them to fail. There was a slowly positive attitude on looking at the bigger things in the country. I started to claim this country as it's my country. Whereas before, it was my country, but I hated this country. I started to move forward, to help other women to know this is their country from '90 because there was already some positive things happening like South Africa is about to be born. I sang N'kosi Sikelela with the Libertas Choir and people stood for it. So my attitude was somehow changing, saying, "Guys, start planning your future or be serious about your future." Totally, when Siphos was born, I was grasping the feeling of, "I'm not a terrorist here, it's my country."

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It's a moment I can never forget in my life. I can never forget that I sang N'kosi Sikelela for that flag. On the day of the changing of the flag, the Libertas Choir sang N'kosi Sikelela finish and Die Stem finish.

As we drove to Cape Town on the bus, I learned Die Stem that day, that hour. I learned that and I could keep it in my mind for the performance, then let go. Just like you're going to see it for the last time.

I could picturize the words of Die Stem for the first time in my life. I picturized the mountains of South Africa, out of the words of Die Stem. I picturized our seas, our oceans. I picturized everything that was there when the plane flies over. It was the first time that I feel as a part of this country that we singing about all these years. But what I don't like about Die Stem is that it's sung in Afrikaans and the tune and the words make me think of the oppression years.

If we still sing Die Stem, the ghosts of the past will always be alive. People that has gained so much in the past will always go back and see the beautiful days of oppression. Their minds will always feel those were the days that were right. Whereas those days to me were battered. So these guys has to allow their minds to leave the past and all what associate with the past. Just keep it as a reference that we can't do it again, we won't go back there. If I was an Afrikaner, I should have just said, "If I want to move forward, I have to forget about things that are holding me into the past." Die Stem has got a super power on oppression.

N'kosi Sikelela was sang hoping for a good thing, even the words are saying that. And who does not hope for a good thing today? When we sang N'kosi Sikelela, we sang hoping to be seen as human beings among other human beings, hoping to change the system of education, hoping to be equal, to have better salaries. Our national anthem should talk about moving forward.

That day, when we sang, it was windy and people were cheering down there. "Viva!" – the noise! I knew discrimination is not over. I was not blind by that. I knew it was just the beginning of another turn. But I was so happy.

In the bus driving from Cape Town to Stellenbosch on the way home, I could sense it, the anger, the disappointment. Libertas Choir is mostly Afrikaners and a few blacks. Jocelyn, one of the ladies that was singing in Libertas Choir, said to me, "Ag, Congratulations," in Afrikaans.

I said, "Oh thank you."

After a while I said, "For what?"

She said to me, "You guys have won the country."

It was very funny for me to hear her say that. Before she said that, for me it was like every South African has won. Because even Afrikaners, I thought they have won.

They were also oppressed in a way. I wanted to take the conversation further, but I could see it's like a fire that can start any minute. There was anger, there was frustration, there was disappointment and jealousy.

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At that time, we lived in a flat. It was a good place to live, to stay. My children did not understand or know anything about squatter houses or township life. We protected them from these things, but we did not want them to see these things in a negative way. One day we drove in Stellenbosch and we were driving amongst the squatter houses. My two girls were in the back and I was holding Siphon in front. We heard them saying to each other. "Why are these people so dirty? Look – they're throwing their dirty water in the streets. Look the way they dress, they untidy." At the end, Evelyn said to Thania, "Don't talk like that – it's mommy's people and mommy's gonna be hurt." Because their daddy looks like a coloured man, they believe I'm the only black person in the family. They think they are all coloured. Black people are accepted as mommy's family, my people. We did not respond at that particular time, though I was quite worried about that.

The same day we drove past Kayelitsha along the beach. They were talking about the squatter houses to a white friend and they were laughing about the untidy people. Evelyn was six and Thania was four.

I want my children to be in this country – I really want them to know about South Africa, to know about our history as a country, as a society, to know about their parents' history. But I also want them to go out and be challenged. I don't want them to grow up being negative towards white people, towards their own color, towards coloured, and I don't want them to be so confused by many terms that are used among race in South Africa. I want them to be blind when it comes to that. So far they pick up a lot what happens around.

I was disturbed more than anything else because if I allow my children to look at poor people in a negative way, it will be like I'm teaching my children to oppress and to undermine another human being. Later, I sat down with them and I told them about how they must look at people – not must - but how one should look at another being and told them, "What you see in a person, it's not always the way that person is, because life can turn you into many things."

I told them about how I grew up and how things were happening around me. I told them how I worked to make sure that I'm not going to totally lose my dreams. What makes one to be like bergees is losing dreams; it's seeing that those dreams are not in action and there's no way to put them in action. I told them, "That does not justify anything. That does not give anyone a reason to be dirty. That does not give anyone a chance to steal or to harm anyone, because we all have to deal with things." But I

really explain to them carefully that they must never undermine bergees or people in squatter homes. They must never think they are not human beings. Who knows? Maybe they are super beings – maybe there are Mandelas there. But someone has hurt them, someone has robbed their future. Someone has totally taken advantage of the situation and I would not love my children to do the same.

I explain slowly how things have been in South Africa and I was very careful. I'm always careful when I talk to my children or to anyone about South Africa. I don't want to create anger in a person's heart because of what happened to me or what happened before in South Africa. I always believe people need to have a space to judge things by themselves, to really see how they must think about a thing. I don't want them to hate white South Africans or to hate any white in that manner.

But one has to tell – we have to tell - our children about what made us not to be rich, successful, educated. Otherwise, they think we stupid, we lazy, we not trying hard enough. So I carefully explain to my children what happened before and the way I see things. When I talk to my children, I block many things about my past. I don't want to carry the sadness with me because I think that bag will be very heavy. But I don't want to forget it at the same time. I just leave it there and use it as a reference. I told my children, "Slowly slowly, as you breathe in life, as you breathe in your past – start to pick up what was positive about it. Give it a chance before you can judge or finalize how you think about things. Maybe for years you did not see it, or for hours or for weeks. It might be that your anger is determining your way of seeing things."

101

When the squatter camp in our area, where Lindiwe was staying, got chased away, they started Nomzamo. And they started to need building material. Again, we went looking for Lindiwe, to see if she's okay. When we got there, Lindiwe's mom was very sick. They were living in a plastic house. There was a few pieces of zinc, but the plastic on the outside of the house was making "Wha, Wha" noise.

Okay, we said, we will try to help them. And Boy just went around that day to check the farmers that he knows and ask about the building materials for these things and really farmers said, "Okay, we will do it for you. We will get the things." Some will say, "Oh, Boytjie, is it you? We will get you a truck." Then we share amongst all these women that we know, but mostly went to Lindiwe. We also used to send lot of food to them. Her mom still thank me for it. You get stuff that are cheap, then we buy a lot and then we go and drop it by her and say please, she must share with the other

people. We could help her because at the time Lindiwe was not working and they had nothing else.

That group started to tell others about what I'm doing and that's how I started helping people. It's really a hard way to explain how I started. It just expanded and expanded and I will counsel rape victims unaware of I'm counseling really. You find yourself counseling domestic violence. You find counseling marriage affairs, unaware, totally unaware. And at the end, you start to say, "But I was counseling a marriage thing here," or "I was counseling a domestic violence." At the beginning, I did not trust myself. I thought I can talk to the group of people and give it to the social workers or to people that are in that field. Especial there was white people that were doing that. Then I started to go to do courses more and more. I started to send other people to courses.

Also we tried to get people to get in jobs. We used the advantage of people that knew Boy around. We said, "We got these two womens that we know. They are honest people. We're not saying they can't do anything wrong, but as far as we can tell, they are honest people. Can you please give them a job?" And we get others in Van Riebeek Hotel, just not far from us and sometimes in old age homes, jobs sometimes in cleaning houses or restaurants. That's how we sort of like expanded, man.

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At this time I was working for First National Bank. I left First National Bank because I needed more challenges. So I started at Midas Paints. When I started there, the managing director decided they must send me for a course – the course was communication and speech therapy. If I'm not exaggerating, the course costed them about R10,000-15,000. I was very, very grateful and it was tough, though. The course is one of the good institutes in South Africa. Most of the ministers go there for learning how to deal with audiences and to really be active on their speeches. So, I went to the course and I did it. I was proud of myself, I did well. And I believe God knew that I need that course to talk to people effectively according to the world. He knew that I am going to use that learning one day as I'm now many times invited to give talks on motivation or rape to other people – and it will be huge audiences like three hundred or more women. So I'm using that skill from the original skill that I had as I was born.

Also in Midas Paints, I had a boss named Chris Badenhof who used to challenge me so much. He taught me how to deal with many things in my life and it taught me how to deal with racism. When I got there, I will be so angry at any talks that counts for racism and after a while, he will challenge me in front of people and he will call me to his office. I will be angry and angry and at the end, Chris will just say to me, "I want you to know this – you're still young, and there's still a lot for you to do. I'm going to challenge you, I'm going to say what I feel it's right. And you're going to challenge me to prove me wrong. I will agree and disagree. You're not just here to be my employee – you're here to learn something." He was racist but he was quite nice and he tried hard.

103

After a while, I was starting to pick up a sickness when they making paint. It was a chemical sickness as I was a secretary in the office. After the doctor told me, I can't wait for my dispense. I was very hurt, but I couldn't stay home and not work. As I was going for this treatment, one of my clients in counseling told me about this job at Markham's as a credit promoter. I called and fill in the forms and I went for interviews and I end up going for a final interview. I was so excited. In this interview, I could really sense it that I'm going to have the job – the job is mine. When I was asked to say whatever I want to say, I told the guy that was interviewing me if there's anything happening on the staff, like stealing of clothes, he must not hire me because I won't be able to work if that is happening. I will report it if I pick up anything like that. I said, "I don't want to go home in the afternoon not feeling I did my best. So if I know there's any things like stealing happening I will tell." And that guy hired me, he ended up being my regional manager. I just resign at Midas Paints – and I started working.

When I got at Markhams, with the Foschini Group, they thought it was a affirmative action position. But I proved them I qualified more than that affirmative action. The others that were not affirmative action were threatened because I worked hard to prove it to myself and to prove it to them – this is not affirmative action position. So I proved them. I refused to stay in the affirmative action.

The job was much much slower than what I used to do at the bank and at Midas. From the beginning, I started to think, "Oh gosh, I went lower than where I was," and I was not challenged at all. I was not challenged by the conditions, I was not challenged by professionalism, and I did not find my senior manager challenging. I

was trained for a while at a central store, so I knew what to expect and how to act. When I got back to my store, I could see my manager was in this thing of corruption. I mean peoples' bags were not searched and clients— especially family clients – were allowed to go to the store room and their bags are not searched. I was frustrated about this. People that were working there were like family – the whole staff was united. And their families were walking in and out of the storeroom and all over. I did not hated the fact that they are family – it was nice to see them so united, but I can admit that I hated what was behind that united. These guys were changing shoes, leaving their shoes and stealing the Markham's shoes. They had families that were changing especial jeans, jewelry, and I was a credit promoter – my God! I needed to promote credit! I was second in charge, I needed to see my skill, my professionalism, I needed to be proud of myself. Before I can be proud of anything else outside myself, I need to see myself doing this out of the best, my honesty. So I confronted my manager. I said to her, “According the way I’m trained, a clients' bag has to be searched and the stuff has to be searched as well when we leave the store in the afternoon and when they go to lunch. It’s not that I’m accusing them of stealing, it’s because it’s the rule of the company. I see this is not happening and I’m here for a while now and it frustrate me. I see your family and the other guy’s family going straight to the back – meaning the storeroom – and they’re not searched – this frustrate me.”

She said, "Gertrude, I trust my staff, I trust my family.”

I said, “I do trust them too, but trust needs to be earned and I don’t think Foschini Group will agree with you – you just can’t trust anyone when it comes to other things – especial money. In the same time, the policy of this company does not say if you trust your family you can let them go anywhere; if you trust your staff, you don’t have to search their bags. It’s actually saying the opposite.”

104

Mr. Ellman was my area manager and he called his managers bitches. I would say, "Mr. E., you don’t call me a bitch – no one has ever called me a bitch and no one will ever call me a bitch.” This woman, Olivia, she will support him. She said, “No, Mr. E. always call me a bitch – all his managers and we don’t mind about that.” How can a woman support a man that is calling her bitch?

I said, “But I’m not his manager. I’m Gertrude. I’m Nonzwakazi and I don’t allow anyone to call me that way.”

In June holidays, Mr. E. left to take his children to Kimberly as well because he was from the Free State. He said anything that happens in his stores, as he was the area manager of about six stores, we must just tell the regional manager.

I started to see the documents of how employees were buying clothes on their clients' accounts and especial to boyfriends and girlfriends with no signature or authority that give them that. Then one morning when I was counting money, it showed that there was money that was lost previously - 3000 Rand. I was shocked because it’s my line – it’s actually where I’m working. I’m communicating with the head office about this. I spoke to a manager and told him that I’m going to ask him to be in charge for a day because I really need to work at the back office to check what went wrong. I check that credit, notes, everything. I find many faulty stuff that were happening before I was there. I make copies of those from when I was not at Markham’s yet and I make copies of those from the months that I started at Markham’s. I refiled them all and I went around in storerooms and I check what I was seeing. The following day, I ask the staff if we can come early and we counted many things and I compare with our counting and with the counting in the computer. I compared the goods that are supposed to be in and the goods that we have sold already. I counted the returns and the spoiled, damaged goods. There was a gap according to what is in these notes, these credit notes. So, I called the regional manager and I showed him and I said I’m just frustrated about this. He said, "Gertrude, good job, thank you.”

Mr. Ellman came back and was furious. Why did I show my regional manager what is happening in his store? I couldn’t understand at the beginning – why is he so furious? He should say, "Let’s work on it. What happened here?" But I was not aware that this guy saw this as a threat actually. He called me for meetings and he was very angry. Why didn’t I do that and that? These meetings were illegal, according the way that employees has to be treated. He was taking advantage of someone that he didn’t know – you don’t mess with her. I spoke to my husband about this and he said, "No, this is a method that Boers use to kick you out of a job. So you must tape him." Remember, my husband was a policeman, so he knew these things. He gave me these small tapes and I taped him. I taped whatever conversation that I had with him. So I taped him saying, “Gertrude, you been bitchy with me. I’ll show you I’m your boss.”

He was very angry. Who is this kaffir woman in front of him telling him what to do? So the thing went further. He really started to work a strategy to get me out of the

job. If I say to them I'm going to stay a little bit late to finish what I couldn't do during the day, they will say no. If I say to them, "Can we come early in the morning – then I can open the store early and be able to do some job before the customers come?" – No. Or maybe they say okay, but the following morning, no one will pitch up and I couldn't open the store alone. So I just work harder.

I wrote letters stating everything that I have experienced – stating what was good and challenging, that is positive, and also stating about what frustrated me more. I told them about Mr. E.'s disapproval on what I did. I wrote letters to all the heads of departments of head office and the directors and human resource department. I wrote letters to them to let them know about what is happening and I stated that why I'm doing that is because I loved working at the Foschini Group, and I loved my company. I wanted to do good for myself, for my family and for my company. Also because when we steal things in companies, we affecting other beings – other people that are working honest, sweating honest. Then I resign.

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Today when I look at my beloved country, I got frustrated when it comes to our children because we're having this crime – children are missing, being raped – all over the country. We tell them, "Don't go to strangers, beware of strangers, be careful, don't trust anyone."

If we can be really deeply honest, our children will never look at a white person as a stranger – especially a decent white because we grew up believing what they do is right, what they say is right. They are to be trusted, they give money, they give jobs, they smile the most smile, they got a beautiful heart that protects – they are doctors, they are lawyers, they are baas. They are everything. They are our controllers – how can they harm us? How can they harm little kids? I don't think children in this country are looking at the white people as they strangers. So I don't want to be blind with that.

If we talking about white children here, who are they looking as a stranger, as someone that can harm them? Of course, they looking at the black and coloured, but mostly black. Because especial today, what are their mothers or their families talking about? About the black government that is corrupt, crime has raised in the country, they not even trusting the government. Those children are taught not to trust the government. They don't even know if they can trust police, because the

country is controlled by a black man and they don't feel safe around that. And, actually, that is created by their families. They got the biggest safe gates around them – how can they trust a black person, how can they trust coloured? I think they trust other whites, but not the blacks in this country. So I just got a little bit worried when I look at this, when I hear us saying to children, "Don't trust strangers." Maybe we should look for another term – a term that will fit South Africa – that will not divide – that will not bring more harm to our country. Because it looks like we're bringing more division into this society and especially to our generation. I would not like to see South Africa raising children that are gonna be stressed out, children that are full of fear, children that have no hope of the world, of their country, children that hate. I want our children to love each other, to embrace what they got, to embrace what their fathers and their forefathers like Madiba have worked so hard for, have compromised their own happiness for them. I would like them to embrace this and walk out of the fear that I grew up in. We want them to enjoy life as it comes and to be able to face it together, not to face it in separate corners and behind security gates.

106

In January, I went to Europe with the Libertas Choir, very exciting. The whole six months, we were told we were going. Everybody was talking about it. It was not scary because I was going with other people that I knew.

It was hot hot hot in Cape Town; we go to the other side, it's freezing cold in Paris. We went to eight countries including the UK and we stayed for two months. In Germany, we saw this road - the streets that are made of rocks, cobblestones, and we were crossing this street I was scared to walk, it was cold and I'm afraid I'm going to slip and fall. I said to this woman that was walking with me, and she was white, "Looking at this, I can imagine the slavery that has done this, the slaving to make this road."

I was sort of like being introduced in some level of politics, of questioning some sort of like bigger things. Looking at those churches, I was thinking, "I wonder who builded this church? Was there just Europeans or was any sweat of a black person here? How were they treated at that time?" They will tell us, "This church has been standing here for eight hundred years," but mostly for me, I was questioning who build it.

When I was in the UK, in London, I was just so thankful to be there, but yet so angry. I remember the first day when we came, I was just so annoyed already. I was annoyed that I'm in the multigreat Britian that has taken so much from Africa and other continents, that has taken so much from me personally. I'm in this country now. I want to look at each and every thing and be familiar to it, that I will never erase it. In the bus, my mind was so much divided on my own thinkings. I wanted to see UK in the eyes of my granddad. I wanted to look at everything that I see and say, "I wonder, what is the percentage that my granddad has worked for this thing because whatever that my granddad has worked for, has ever done, that money was invested by the Browns."

The following day I took a walk. Ali, in that whole trip, I didn't just leave a hotel and walk. But in the UK I just wanted to be in this land that my granddad and the people around him have worshipped. I want to see the ground that this family that was so worshipped came from. I just wanted to feel that. So I took a huge walk. I just wanted to be in that. It was very personal. I went to the field, like a huge ground where they said in summer, the queen will walk. I imagine the beautiful flowers and the children will greet her. I just wanted to feel this great Britain that has taken so much from me, the air of it, how does it smell, how to inhale the air, how to exhale in this land. How do I feel, what is the difference? What is the food that they eat? Funny enough, the food that we ate in that hotel was very familiar to what the Browns would eat at home.

So to other people in the choir, it was being in London. To me, it was bringing my family, my ancestors, and it meant a lot. Going to sleep was not just an ordinary going to sleep to me. I would want to go and stand outside and see the sun going down, being in the UK, and just feel how is it. To feel how anyone who decided to go and colonize any people out there to make the Great Britain, how did they really feel when the sun goes down? Can I come to that? How do they feel when they wake up in the morning? How do people feel in the UK if they know that they're helped by so many people in other countries, by Asia, by Africa. Somehow, the sweat of my granddad is still somewhere walking around, though he died. So my UK trip meant a very lot to me.

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One day after our trip to Europe, I went to do a char for this woman. Actually I'm old enough in South Africa, I could never clean another woman's house as a char, I

would be nuts. I clean her house as a friend; this woman was with us in the same church. She was going under operation and I went to her house to look after her child - also Sipho was a baby at that time.

You know what? She put 10 Rand under the basket where the dog lay. I thought because she had two shops in Stellenbosch and Somerset West, because they are rich, it was just money lying around. I cleaned this thing of this dog and I wrap it right and I put this 10 Rand somewhere, next to her bed where she can see it. And I continue working. I went to her children's room and I find money in corners, I just collect the money and put it right or I just clean and put the money back. Usually, I try to put it in a place that was visible for them to see it. Whenever I go to help her out, the same thing happens. I told Boy and Boy said that is the white man's way of testing you. I couldn't believe it. And she keep on doing this. If it's not 20 Rand, it's 50 Rand in sort of like funny corners where I can easily steal that money, thinking she has forgotten. I just keep on cleaning and put it back.

One day we were leaving and she gave me old stuff that came from one of her shops - pies that she couldn't sell. They were old. And she gave me to eat and to give it to my children. I just look at her when she gave me this stuff and I smile and I took the stuff back and I put it in a dustbin. When I come back the next week, she said, "Oh, I saw these pies in the dustbin."

I said, "Oh yeah, because they were old."

She said, "They were not that old, that's why I gave it to you."

I said, "Oh no, if they were not that old, I should have seen you eating them. So they were old and I don't eat old stuff and I don't give old stuff to my children because it's poison." I did not shout at her or anything, that was just the answer that I gave her.

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Her husband was actually Boy's senior boss, he was a senior policeman in Stellenbosch. One day we were sitting at her lounge in winter. We're talking about forgiveness according to the Bible. She said, "You know what, Gertrude? I used to do wrong things." She told me about how she got involved with her husband. She was selling her body and she saw this guy that was rich and younger than her and she get him to sleep with her and then she was pregnant. Her husband was single and had this big Mercedes Benz and all these houses. So she saw him as a fish, a good fish to catch - she actually did say that. His father was the one that was the

senior in the Western Cape, so she knew they won't want to spoil their name if she is pregnant. So they were married.

What started to interest me more in her conversation, it was when she was talking about how beautiful is the Kruger National Park. "Now the black people under this new government, they don't know what they're doing. Everything is dying, the beauty of Kruger National Park is dying, they don't know what they do. How can they be trusted, because blacks can kill each other about 5 Rand?"

I thought, "Did I suddenly become white? Is there any mirror near me that I can still see if I'm still Nonzwakazi Gertrude Sgwentu? Or did I sort of like become coloured?" What was happening? Because she's talking to me as a black person, which means I also can kill anyone for five Rand.

I said to myself, "Gertrude, you have to be big here. You have to hear this woman out. Let her tell you about herself. This is your chance to know what a white person think about a black person."

Ali, I tell you, it's tremendous to look at you and be able to trust you and be able to disagree with you. To be able to say, "I don't do things like that. I do it this way. This is Africa, that's how things happen." Because we grew up in this fear of white people, you can't disagree. These guys grew up being our boss and she has to give you orders. With you, it's the first step to freedom that I can be where I am today.

But this woman laughed and she finally said, "You know what Gertrude? You know this Terreblanche? I used to work hand in hand with him. I was his assistant. There were two assistants. We used to be the people that were pouring poison in the pipes, those pipes that take water to the townships in Natal."

I was thinking of these pipes. I couldn't imagine how big this thing was and what happened to these people! She was saying they used to plan and do these killings and she knows where Terreblanche stays and they will have parties in his farm. She was big in the Broederbond!

This woman does not know what is family all about. Because for me, as Gertrude, a black skin is my aunt, is my graddad, is my family. And a white skin is my family when that skin want to be my family. I cannot automatically think that because generations and generations we were forced to be apart, to think we're not the same human beings. Ali, I was looking at her and thinking, "Who do I tell this to?" It needs to be told to someone who can start to understand why is there a lot of sickness in black people. Why do so many many black people got problems with their bones, with their wombs, with their skins, with lot of things? She's supposed

to go to the Truth and Reconciliation. Something has to be done. A law has to be enforced. Crime is above the limit in South Africa. What was she doing with her buddies? That was beyond the worst crime. How many people that died because of that poison?

She told me these things and Ali, she will laugh. She'll say, "Hee hee, you don't know." Which means there's more to it and somehow there was still a feeling of being an Afrikaner that fight for her to maintain power. There was an Afrikaner standing in front of me, being so holy as a Christian. And where do I stand? What do I do? Do I say, "You are a murderer"? Or do I judge this woman? Do I run to the police? Her husband is a big police of the Western Cape, her father-in-law is in charge over the Western Cape. My husband is the lowest of the lowest of the police force.

I was listening to every word that she was saying, but I was saying inside, "Gertrude, just close. Close your heart. Don't let who you are be taken away by this anger that is forcing itself to your heart to destroy what is invested in you, but keep this information to see a white side."

109

After apartheid ended, we had the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They were showing something on television about the death of the Gugulethu 7 and how this askari got turned to work with the police because he is black and he will be trusted in townships. This askari police guy has trained black children to be freedom fighters and then he will take them and get them killed. I was like, "These were police that were doing this here! Who knows which police is that? That could be my husband." I was getting frustrated because so many things around simple crime, even today, that Boy can't tell me. There's so much secrets that is just for his job. It's confidential, he can't tell me.

When I watched this thing about the Truth and Reconciliation, I was thinking, "Am I sitting with a man that did that? Was one of the days that Boy came home to hold me and he told me he loved me, was that after beating someone or maybe after killing someone?" I expressed these feelings, I said, "Boy, don't think I'm questioning you. I trust you, I know you're a really good person, but I want you

to tell me if you have ever been involved in that. What did you do before Evelyn was born?"

My concern was, this woman that was married to police in the TRC, they don't know anything about what their husbands are doing. They come home, they wash hands with the hands that they have killed the people. When you're in love with someone, you love that person to hold you. You don't want them to hold you with the same hands that is doing these dirty jobs, with the same mouth and mind. You want that mind to think about you and love the healthy, blessed future. It could be the same mind is the mind that plans to kill another person! So, I was like, "Am I sitting with that?"

And he said, "Look at me. If I was involved on those things, I could have been high in the police in those days, I could have been a high guy. Nobody could have been promoted if you're not willing to do those things. So that's why they have tramped on me. They have used me as a ladder; I couldn't be involved in those things." So for 8 years in the apartheid police force, he never got promoted. Now the police is run by the former MK guys and they refuse to promote him, though he's the best in his department - because he worked as a police under apartheid. So he's sitting there in the same job for 22 years. And I believe him when he says he never did those things.

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We tried to put our children in two schools last year, they were not allowed. They said we are too far. This man told us all the laws, all the laws that say they can't take children from other towns. But it's here in the Heldeberg Basin, it's in Somerset West. I can drive children to get to school any minute, Boy can drop them, we can hire taxi to get them there. And two coloured children in this street were allowed to get in these particular schools. It's like he doesn't think we can live in this area. He won't accept them because they black

So, that is not democracy. Definitely, that is not democracy. Why don't we fight the school through the law? Fighting is another thing. I cannot put my children in that situation. If I fought, I might end up winning. I think I can win that. And then my children are gonna be frustrated. They going to go through the same thing that I went through. I don't want my children to have a sense of being discriminated because it's a very hurtful pain. They do have it now in many things. I can't protect them all over. I don't want to put my children in frustration. And I can't just fight it for other people as well. I got too much better things to do.

Right now, I must look at the broader picture, because our country is still in the hold of the white South Africans. We still really swimming under them because economically we have no money. Indians don't have money, coloureds don't have money, blacks don't have money. So, they are still holding all the things. Where there's money, there's power. Understand? So things are changing slowly. I don't say things are not changing. But democracy is still a dream to us.

111

I got frustrated when people will praise the white South African of they are doing good. There are good white South Africans that are supporting the new South Africa. But if all white South Africans really believed on democracy, we were going to see the democracy alive. There are so many things that are not being said because people are so worried that white South Africans are going to be angry - they're protecting them. For me, that does not bring really democracy. It's not working. People has to know we are in a new era that we have to be open and deal with our feelings, rather than going with pretence. Mandela did that a lot. He did a lot of pretence, of protecting white people. Quickly, if they don't like something, you'll see the government working towards that to improve it. They will really try to please them. We not equal at all. And we not looking at this generation that we can use the word equal. It's just a dream. And in that dream, it still far away to use the word equal.

Right now, democracy is totally not a reality. If it's a reality, it's a reality that is grabbed. For example, with the affirmative action, they are frustrated there. The affirmative action people are just statues that are standing there - that is not equality. Many many people are just frustrated being in a position just for a show and they're not being trained to do their jobs by the people who know how. So, which means they're still not given a space. What I can think they are given is just a lot of water to drink and now they're drowning. And they seeing their dreams passing by. They are tempted because they earning so lot of money. They can't leave those positions, even though they know they not qualified, because they know what is suffering. The amount, the salaries they are earning - it's a huge amount. So, they are tempted, they are forced to be there.

Maybe you might say, "Why don't they refuse it?" You must understand - we coming from a era of eras of being discriminated, being poor. So money tempt people. And who can be rich and choose to be poor again? We know the experience - when you know the experience of something, if it was a terrible bad experience,

you will never dream of going back to that. So those people are really still being used by the system. The system is using them.

I find many people wanted me to work with them and they will say, “Gertrude, you are black, you’re a woman – these days you can get away with anything.” I wanted to work with them, but when they started to say that to me, I didn’t really like it. I started to say, “I struggled all those years being a black person, not having any big power at my back. And I struggle – I’m still alive. Why must I give up to these people right now? You are used by people that have money. People that are saying, “Say this, Gertrude, we’ll back you up.” Which means I’m used because of my color, you understand? So, I find in many ways, I got caught in these things, but I’m refusing to do that.

Chapter 9

Life is unreasonable

112

We started counseling rape survivors, Boy and I, as we worked in Nomzamo, where Lindiwe lived. We get so frustrated by the people who are making excuses for rapists, with an excuse of men who grew up with their fathers beating their mothers. People have the excuse of, "It's because you never have a proper family." I never saw my father, I don't even know who's my father. Why do I love working with people? Boy never even saw his father. Boy stayed with his mother up to the age of 9, when he was sent to the other people. But he does not take that anger to me or to anyone, in fact, he's counseling rape victims, he's teaching people about domestic violence. He's now involved with teaching police to understand the domestic violence and he's not angry at his mother, he's not angry at any women. People that are putting those excuses, can they interview other people like Boy? Can they interview people like me? And hear our side? Many people that are experiencing the hurtful, but they're trying to deal with that.

In any level - in the social level, in the politics level, there is no excuse to harm another person. People rape because they want to have power over people; it's not about what happened in the past. What happened in the past maybe leads to unemployment but that's not a excuse. We can't say, "If there was a job, this person wouldn't have raped this person." Can you say that? It's damn stupid. I won't take a shit like that. I won't take an answer like that. They look at that person and they just want to dominate or to have power over that person. That must be dealt with straight and not have any excuses. I don't care "because" of what. I don't think we must deal with "if." People has to just deal with something straight on. We have to say, "You have raped this person and you have no excuse. Don't tell us about your past; we don't need your history here. You gonna be punished because you did this. Why did you do this?"

I don't think we're going to build this country on any foundation of excuses. We were all discriminated. Mandela was discriminated more than anything else. Thabo was. Big guys, freedom fighters were. But why are they helping to heal this country? They're not looking at "if" and "because." They're helping the country. They see what happened; I don't think we can ever forget it. But it doesn't mean that we're just going to use it to say, "Oh, United Nations, help us. Oh, we were

discriminated." No, we want the United Nations to help us to move forward, not to help us to stay on our excuses. That's what I'm looking at.

113

As I enjoyed counseling women and helping them when I can, I tried to meet more groups, so I can connect them. I called the municipality and I ask who do they know that is working with women in Grabouw. I said I want to invite them to a gathering. "It won't be easy," they said, "you must first call the welfare." The welfare gave me the mayor's wife's number and the mayor's wife said, "No, you must talk to MamNkinkana." And MamNkinkana said, "Come, I will get the womens for you." That Saturday I came about 3:00 and it was dark gray. You know when life is gray in a place? The women just came from the plantation, picking the apples, and they came to listen to me in numbers! I thought I was going to take about maybe 12 women. Ali, that creche was full. I sat on the small chair of the creche, they could not believe that I did that. They were so down to earth, so humble, so smiling. When I look at their eyes, there was a glaze of layers of hunger to come through to the soul. So much that I had to look deeper. The love was obvious, but the hurt was so much rooted. You know when I say hurt, I mean hunger too, all that is in there. But it was so easy to give love to those women.

MamXhaympi came in late and she said, "Oh, is the child that we're going to listen to? And she's sitting down!" They were so amazed that I can just sit on those small chairs, the nursery school chairs. I was sitting with them and my bag was far away from me; they were so impressed. They said, "You're the first person to come from Cape Town and talk to us and sit and relax with us. The others will just come and ask us to sign papers and stand there and they going to the car."

I said, "Anyway, I'm not from Cape Town, I'm just around the corner from you." Ali, that day was not a formal thing. They ask me all sort of questions. They ask me things that I thought, "Gosh, is there people that doesn't know simple things like that?" They were asking about overseas and all the countries because they thought Egypt and Israel is in Heaven. How can they hear about Jerusalem on the news? They ask me about what do we mean when we say the Rand is smaller because they still see the size of the Rand the same. Many many things that is really hurting me to see people that is in the really island. Theirs is a island of the poorest.

Instead of having this talk that was going to be like inviting them to the women's conference and getting them to be bridging this gap, we were just talking. That's why

I believe on relationships. I don't think I can ever move away from that. There are people that are in need of what you take for granted. What you call basic is a huge amount to other people. It's a degree to other people. You know, they didn't have a clue about money. As I was talking to them, in my mind I'm like, I have to get someone to come and talk to them about money. They wanting to know about the accounts, wanting to know about the interest. They wanted to know about so small things.

Life was so unfair just by looking at them. A group of huge womens that look like they're losing their dreams. The anger of apartheid started to rise in my heart. And you can't talk to them about apartheid. They don't know what is apartheid really. They think the old government is Mandela – Mbeki is a new government. They don't know about the apartheid government, they just know that they don't like a white man.

You hear them even today, they will say, "You must not talk your English. Don't mix English when you talk to us." They speak the really pure Xhosa, with no influence from the city.

It was so funny I ended up being in Grabouw. I just wanted Oprah to go there and introduce those women in the world. I felt like they were drowning and there was no other power that can introduce them and help them to stop the suffocation that they were in and their children. It's so sad, man. They have given up to be servants, to take anything that can come on their way just to give them food. They are in this same life, they go to the same shops; there's no discount for them. It's so unfair. They sang for me and they said, "God, we know that you haven't forgotten about us..."

I was saying, "God, why did you bring me here? I don't want to see this. What can I do about this?" Already I sense it's a huge problem. Where do I start? Who can help me with this?

All the time I'm talking and I'm going on and my children are in the car, sitting there and waiting for mommy. When these women were singing and they got me in the car, they were waving and they talking to my children. When we drove away, Thania started to say, "Mommy, that was too much." But she was smiling to them while they were greeting her. I said, "Oh, I know Lolly, and I'm so sorry."

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Some people say I'm unreasonable, trying to help people when I have nothing. Leaving my children in the car for three hours. Am I being unreasonable? I'm

unreasonable because life is unreasonable. God is unreasonable. He sent his own son to this world to die for us – that was unreasonable – a reasonable God won't do that. And he did so many things that I think they are unreasonable. He let the flood for Noah and killed so many people – that's unreasonable. Maybe he is unreasonable because he let me suffer so much in life. He let black people to be oppressed so much in South Africa. He let the Jews to die so much under other human beings – that's unreasonable. He could have done something about it, you know. So many people are killing each other – he's powerful, he's mighty – he can do something about that. He's unreasonable. I think his love is unreasonable. So, I think life is unreasonable.

No one has ever promised me that life is easy. No one has ever promised me that life is reasonable. And I like that.

115

I'm proud to be a woman. I'm proud to love womens the way I do. I'm proud to hug them. I'm proud to wipe their tears, to wipe my tears. I'm proud to give birth to a child, to look after that child.

A woman is a special thing. Your body is always attractive, as a woman. So we want to find womens being respected and we want generations to come to respect this thing that naturally is respected. A woman's body's natural respected – there's nothing that you need to add. I'm always loving women or wanting to help them. Sometimes I will be so confused and look at the clothes that they wearing – "Why are they wearing so nice clothes if they don't have money?" But at the same time, I will tell myself, "If I want to help these people, I must not look on how they look." Because if they wearing nice clothes, it's like I'm jealous of they having nice things – it's like I'm looking down at them, they can't have nice things. I must just allow God to use me because I believe God is not unfair – he won't want me to help these people if they don't need help. He will protect me on that. So I must just let go that thing of, "Why are they having so nice things? Why are they having that?" If I just feel like helping them, I must help them and I must not ask them, "Why are you having that?" Otherwise they going to pull away.

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In Grabouw, the most thing that they have asked me is the Bible, they wanted Bibles. And I called around, I spoke to my church, "Please, I got this bunch of

women that are asking for Bibles. Can you get people to donate Bibles?" I called Bible Brothers and they said I can have a Bible at R5 each. And I said I don't have that. I'm looking at about 90 Bibles. I don't even have a cent. "I'm not a group of anything, I just need Bibles for this group of people. I should think you can do that." They said, "Why don't you talk to your church?"

I said, "These women are not in my church and my church is saying they don't have money."

Then he said, "If you can buy about 100 Bibles, I can sell them about R2 each to you." I counted that; it was still too much. I don't have money. I called people around and no one was really interested in that. So it did not happen. I was sad because for me, it was like they're saying, "Give us the knowledge of God, help us to get the knowledge of God." Ali, there's still a lot of things that I would love to do for these guys, but mostly, one day, I want to surprise them by those Bibles and say, "I haven't forgotten."

Slowly, I got to know the women of Grabouw and then they will tell other people about me. I will hear, "Oh is this Nonzwakazi? Hi Nzwaky!" Some I don't know, but they know my name. I'll be invited to go and talk to their gathering, to the other squatter areas. Don't think it's a smooth process. Many people are getting sponsored by saying they're working with the squatter people, whereas they're not doing that. So they start to be intimidated, "Why are people so captured by this Nonzwakazi?" There's a lot of jealousy in between, there's a lot of forces in between, but I don't fight it.

I think people that fight things like that are people that don't think they can do it. I know I can do it. I always know a beautiful thing and a strong thing sometimes seems like it's dying and when it's like that, it's absorbing strength. And then when it comes out, it comes up beautiful as a lily. So I don't mind when people try to pressurize anything, because I know I got it in me. They can't take out that root. So that's how I started with them.

I believe, Ali, I'm doing it well. I'm improving every time. In each and every way of talking to a person spiritually, it's my field to uplift people from the inner person. I'm not skilled. I can't teach people about sewing, baking, you know I don't like the kitchen. I'm not a person for these things. But I'm born a psychologist, I'm born a spiritual teacher. I'm born to help people to empower themselves. And I don't have pride for that because I always seek knowledge, I'm hungry for knowledge all the time. The knowledge that I gather, I pass it to other people. I always do that.

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One of my incidents that I faced with the women of Grabouw was getting really excited trying to get them to see Mandela – President Mandela. It was their dream to see Mandela and interact with him, talk with him or just to see him close. I started working on that because it was the only dream that I thought I can really try to give it to them. So it was the year before 1999 that Mandela is going to retire, so the women of the ANC wanted to give him a present. So I took this as an opportunity to bring the women of Grabouw close to Mandela. I knew that it was not possible for them to talk to him, but they will see him talking in front of them. I wrote a letter to the ANC Women's League head office and I asked them if they could help me to get the ladies there. I also asked them, if it's possible, that the people from the rural areas can be in front when we go to this march, that they can be able to have the feeling of seeing Mandela close to them. I asked them as well if they can give us some money to hire taxis.

So, apparently in this letter, I scratched out some sentence. I faxed the letter to them. One day a few days after that I had a call. The person on the other side just said, "How can you send me a letter that has got a scratch in it? How do you think how must I know? How much do you want? You didn't say how much you want. You said R200 and you told us about another amount."

She was going on and on and on. I said to her, "Hello. Can I talk to you? Can you give me a chance?" And she was quiet. I said to her, "When you pick up the phone. And dial 845-8759. And the phone rings on the other side. You must know you have knock at my door. And that door is mine, Nonzwakazi Gertrude Sgwentu. And you must know how to talk to me. You must say, 'May I speak to Nonzwakazi or Gertrude?' And then, if I say, 'speaking,' then you introduce yourself and you tell me why are you calling me. You don't pick up the phone and yell at me and say your say. This is my house. That's how things are done here. You don't do things the way you do at your place or anywhere."

She said to me, "I'm calling from the ANC Women's League."

I said, "I don't mind whether you're calling from the ANC Women's League or whether it's Winnie Mandela or even God! God knows how to talk to me. He never yell at me because he know I got feelings and he knows this is my house and this is my phone."

She said, "I'm old, I'm an older woman."

I said, "It doesn't matter how old are you – you can be 100 years old. This is my home. You never yell at me. And you must know the manners to talk to people and especial phone manners and professional manners. Here I only talk to people who got manners because I got them. I'm sorry I'm not going to talk to you." And I drop the phone.

After that, I walk up and down, doing what I'm doing. Not very long after that, the phone ring and I pick up the phone. This woman said to me, "Hello. This is Ms. Makasi here. I'm calling from the ANC Women's League. I'm a treasury of the ANC. I want to know about the letter you faxed to us and I want to find out why did you scratch the letter and not sign above your scratch? And how much do you want because I'm not clear of how much you want?"

I said to her, "Oh, who did you want to speak to?"

She said, "I would love to speak to Nonzwakazi."

And I said to her, "Oh, you're speaking to me, that is Nonzwakazi."

She said to me, "You are really a strict child."

I said, "Strict, strict." And I said, "I guess I am. It's just that I'm professional."

She said to me, "But, blah, blah, blah, you know, we are so used to each other, we're so used to talk to people of our color and all that."

I said to her, "No, you're not used to me. And even if you're used to me, when it's professional, you must be professional. I cannot let you do that. One day you going to do it, if you haven't done it yet, to other people. And that person is going to say, 'Black people speak like that, including Gertrude.' Whereas Gertrude Nonzwakazi Sgwentu does not speak like that. And when we want to challenge the world, we have to step on professionalism because that's the language of the world."

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I ended up taking the ladies from Grabouw to the gathering in Cape Town and I faced some really problems there. We people from the rural areas arrived at half past seven. The people from Langa, Gugulethu, Mitchell's Plain, around there – they arrived at half past nine. And when they arrived, they started to control us as usual. Which I couldn't allow that. I started to be really frustrated about what I was seeing there. We were told that the people from the peninsula, or Cape Town, they wanted to be in front. I went straight to the woman that was in charge and I said, "I'm a little bit frustrated about this. These people just arrived now and they just around the corner. And they want to be in front. The people from the rural areas

don't know Mandela, they want to be in front. To show that they want to be in front, they were here half past seven, seven o'clock. And it looks like you're allowing these people to be in front and I'm really not happy with it. I know other people are not happy, but they're scared to talk to you, so can you do something about it?"

She said, "Oh no, I understand, comrade." They tried to sort of rectify the problem. I started to say, "Uh oh." I couldn't see any progress. When we were coming close to the Parliament, I started to pull the people that I could see they were coming from the rural areas and I put them in front. This woman and one of them from the ANC women's league challenged me in a sense and I said, "Listen. Mandela walks in and out Cape Town. He goes to places like Langa and all that. So you guys are used to seeing him. If you really really think good, you should give other people a chance to be able to just be close and see this wonderful person that has freed us all – close." It was a big thing. But I ended up getting the ladies that I could recognize in front. I didn't really worry about seeing Madiba because I'd been seeing him many many times, but I was really trying to get the ladies from Grabouw and the other areas to be able to see their lifetime dream.

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All of this happened because I was trying to plan a day, just a day to get people to meet each other. I wanted to invite the Grabouw ladies to Women's Day. That year I arranged the first Women's Day Celebration in the Helderberg Basin. The seed of that Women's Day was in KwaZulu-Natal and surrounding areas in Durban; people were killing each other around politics. It was a daily thing - we will be seeing women on television crying, their husbands burned, their children are dead. To me it was like we are observing other people getting hurt as women and we're not doing anything, we're not marching to stop this, we're not mobilizing. So I was bothered by that and I thought I'm going to use this day, the Women's Day, to talk about these issues.

I thought that was a matter for all women, not just black women. I get all the speakers, call all the professors that I have never met, mayors' wives that I never met as far as Hermanus and they were all like, "Okay, we're coming."

And I was like, "Okay, we need flowers. Can you please donate flowers?" I invited people also using that as a method of getting them to donate something. Then one woman who was helping me organize, Lola, said, "I got a speaker that will be coming from Germany." So she was going to be the main speaker and everybody

was excited about this. Then, when the time is getting close, Lola said, "She's from Germany or she's from America." She's not sure. I was so bothered by this now. We arrange this thing and now we don't know the main speaker, where does she come from!

On that day, we were waiting just for one person from Germany or America. She's a foreigner, so we thought she got money, she drive a beautiful car. Then Lola called and said the speaker just called, she's coming with the train. A train! Who is this speaker?

The time she was supposed to show up, she didn't show up and there was a woman that was coming from Parliament, she spoke. The professor spoke that was going to speak. Julie spoke. And I spoke. This speaker is still not showing up, so then we started eating.

You guys showed up around past three when Boy went to go pick you up at the station. Three young Americans, you showed up with your jeans, with your hair tied, I think one of you had a bandana. You were so young, so innocent, ready to take on the world and I think mostly we were shock. I can remember going to greet you guys. I was shocked you're really Americans. I was so shocked that your parents were free to let you come to South Africa. I was annoyed that Lola let you guys come with the public transport on a Sunday. Boy said that he can't be involved in a danger thing like that, he's a policeman, he knows what's happening around trains on Sunday. We were amazed you guys were so young. We were waiting for this big German lady.

We wanted to take you home to make sure you guys are okay. When we get in the car, I told you about what I'm doing in the way of rape and counseling. Jill was asking what can she do to help, she wanted to be involved in what I was doing. She said she can help me fundraise.

You, Ali, you were very quiet. Then, all of a sudden, you asked a question, "What can I do for you as a person?" I couldn't believe you ask that question. And to tell you the honest truth, I cannot believe I gave you that answer.

"Write my story." I didn't plan for it, it just happened. It's one of those defining moments, the way we met. We didn't plan to meet, we didn't plan to talk about anything, but that day, that moment of us meeting, made a huge relationship like this. That's how we started working on this book and trying to build SAFE.

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I actually started SAFE in 1996. The vision of SAFE was not the same way SAFE got to be run. I wanted to motivate people on SAFE, getting education to women, getting women that are retired, like white women, to help educate. I wanted the black and white to be together. So when I started SAFE, it was to get the retired nurses to come and talk about AIDS, about the importance of periods, everything around when you're getting a child, what is important about being a young woman. I wanted people that know about their bodies, about making sexual satisfaction their own. I didn't know about it, but I knew by reading that there's so much to learn and I always thought this will be so good, this is lacking on the black people - and whites got it.

I wanted doctors to be involved and people that were managers that they can teach people about finance, what it means to be financially secure, what it means to open a bank account. These are the things that I still lack. So whatever that I knew I lack, I wanted to get it for myself and for other people. That was the vision that I had for SAFE. I knew that was going to bridge the gap. If we start to understand those things, people will get used to each other.

What was not a passion to me was to teach people sewing and knitting because it was already all over. And for me, that was a limitation. It was like you limiting people to say, "Okay, this is what you can do." I wanted something challenging to people, that they can see a bigger space where it's not impossible. I wanted to motivate people.

Then SAFE was born. When I met you, I was trying to bring people together, to bridge the gap, all the layers and masks of education, wealth, color and all that - that's my stand, that's what I wanted SAFE to be.

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When I know I'm going to be working with people with a African tradition, like in Grabouw, I automatically know I have to change my strategy of thinking, my strategy of talking, my interaction in terms of listening. When I meet guys like MamXhaympi, I immediately show it to them that I'm human and I laugh as they laugh. Though they always believe I'm educated, I always say to them, "I'm also not educated as you are, don't make a mistake."

There are things that I know I have to compromise in order to interact with these people, in order to understand them, in order to make them understand me, because I love them. My life is empty without them. I share my heart with them, I share my

life with them, I share my spirit with them. I make an opening for the inner Gertrude to interact with them and the inner them to interact with me. That's how to deal with each individual in the group. I don't go out without talking to each and every one. I respect them – I respect their ideas – and I always show that I learn from them and it's not a pretending learning. I got a new thing each and every day when I work with people. I believe that uplift each and every person that I talk to into another standard after they spoke to me.

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With all of our efforts in helping women, we started to make it formal with SAFE and write our constitution. SAFE stands for South African Female Empowerment. After working so hard as far as I can remember, after bringing women together, trying to heal our communities, working with our neighbors and so forth, I learned that I cannot just take anyone as my trustees for the formal organization. I cannot just take anyone as a manager of the project. I cannot take one of the people that I know they are educated in terms of experience, but they not educated in the terms of the world. I have to undermine people that I know they are so brilliant, they great thinkers. I have to say to them, "I'm sorry, you can't be in the board of trustees because you not educated. You don't owe a creche, you don't have a big name in a NGO, or in the political party."

That hurts me. I feel like I'm discriminating people and I feel like the system of the world is making me to discriminate another human being. I feel discriminated, I feel oppressed. I don't need big names – I'm born clever, I'm born intelligent. I know the people of SAFE, the people in poverty, in squatter houses - they very intelligent. I know they can be board of trustees, I know they can answer funders. I know they won't just take peoples' money and just use it. They were the people that were really hurt by discrimination. It's people that really want to come out of the oppression situations. Now I'm the one who has to turn back to them and start to discriminate and start to take people that did not do anything in terms of SAFE and just say, "Please be a trustee," after this huge, hard work. I'm really frustrated about how people with money look at things. Is there no one who can think of looking and just giving us a chance to share our experiences?

Oh, it's very hard to try to start a NGO. It's really something that I can never be able to explain because my English is not good and, and before anyone can come and listen to me, I have to have a CV and the CV has to be fax and check. They will say,

"Oh gosh, she's not a professor, she's not a freedom fighter, she's not anything" – whereas I'm fully one in my way. People want to listen to big names, to people who can speak the language, people who can play with words. People that can use terms of politics, economical terms, terms that are regarded as really terms in the world. We can't do that, we are not given a chance to do that. Is there no one who want to listen to our world?

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From my experience, not from any education, PhD or what, I learned to be strong and to survive and to help others do the same. I think once you carry pain, we turn pain into love and into surviving. Sometimes we turn pain into hate or fear. When I see myself moving towards that trap, I always think, "I will love even if I don't want to love; I will smile even if I don't feel like smiling."

I can teach many. I can teach many about surviving, I can teach many about starving, I can teach many about psychology, I can teach many about pride, I can teach many about compromising, I can teach many about love, I can teach many about forgiveness, I can teach many about faith. I can really teach many. Today, we struggling to have jobs. We are told we are not educated enough. What is education really? I think education is about experience. Even if how educated you are, you might not be able to survive to do things right because you never experience them. I wonder if there's no job that just need an experience of what we have survived before? I wonder if we can ever be given this chance? Anyway, I'm giving myself a chance. I refuse to be ignorant of my potential in this nation.

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There are many NGOs in South Africa that I think they should be really doing their job. NGOs that got a huge amount of funding and they sitting with it and not really interacting with people. Why should people in Grabouw be sitting with a huge problem with their wombs that they don't understand? Why, after all these years, is there nobody coming to talk about rape in places like Nomzamo, Lwandle? And why there's no night schools in places with people who want to study? Why are there places where there's no activities? In Grabouw there's really no activities – nothing that people go to and play net ball or be taught – there's not even a venue! What are the NGOs doing?

People like those ladies in Grabouw are the people who are free to say, "Come and check if your money is used in a proper way." They easy to say, "We're not educated, but we can do this and this." People that are educated got pride in them. They don't want to be monitored because they think they can do it. We, as guys that are not educated, we always want interaction from the people that are educated, but they must just not come and control. There is to be clear difference between controlling and monitoring. Because if one does not monitor, but controls, it's like you oppress people more than before. I would not want anyone that is uneducated to be more oppressed. I feel I already go through that in many ways.

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It was not only big freedom fighters that defeated apartheid. There were quiet freedom fighters that brought us here, that got us where we are. Those that stood and iron for other people. They have ironed this pile of washing, quiet and praying to be released out of slavery. They have shined the longest passages of another white woman. Jacqueline told me one day, "You know, my child, you don't know. I used to work for this woman and she will say to me, "I want to see myself when I walk on my passage, it has to reflect to me as a mirror." So, can I say these guys did not do anything for the struggle? They did their way. Those in squatter houses, rural areas, townships or that today they can't walk, today they are in hospital, they can't do anything – they're not educated at all. They didn't taste the world of education, they didn't taste the world of riches, of wealthy. But they did something. We must never forget that they have struggled – they are freedom fighters. They borrowed us here today to wipe their tears.

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I look at the world as there's a river. On one side of the river, there's all the guys that are really educated. Education is controlled by white people, it's led by them. The big guys that are playing in that, it's white people, so which means it's a white world that mostly everyone envy. It's a world that is glamorous - you just want to go there. That is one side of the river.

The other side of the river is operating totally from love, from trusting there's a spirit that guide us all, a spirit that make us to connect. I operate a lot from that side, from what is natural. Many times I go back to that. I know words is not smart

enough to translate what is happening from another person, to hear the cry, the happiness of another person. It's like you meeting a person that is deaf, that can't speak, but you can feel in the excitement, the love of that person, it can be transformed. I manage to go deeper to that. And people that are doing that from the other side of the river, it's people that are still attached with mother Earth. They still communicate with the reality.

You see that movie the Sixth Sense? "I see dead people." For me, there's some truth in that. In the side of education, there's so lot of dead people that I see. They don't know that they dead. And I find those women on the other side of the river, they don't know that the dead people on the side of education, they needs them. It's like I'm in this river that I have to pull people from both sides and ask them to drink from this water. I have to tell them it's for all of us. That river is not meant to separate. That river is meant for us to drink the water. Because once you drink that water, it becomes part of your body and it brings you to the side of the river, so you can see the other side. Right now, the side of education is getting more and more powerful because the other people on the other side of the river are finding education is the only way to live. And the side of education does not understand the other side, that it's also a good way to live. There are dead people on both sides, but there's more lot of people on the side of education. The more you get into education, the more you are controlled by material, by money. It's easy to jump on that side; it's lovely, you feel like you growing. I feel like I'm growing, I know other people feels that way too. But you're losing your power. Totally you dying and dying from who you are. And you giving your life, your power, to some other power. So there's a lot of dead people on that side. The more people get to that side, they more they die. They don't know that they're dying, they don't know that they're dead. And they are wanting to be helped. With me, I feel I can recognize I'm still lucky because I still operate from the other side of the river.

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Ali, you met me in the low low stage. You saw this powerful woman and in many ways, you just trusted the unseen. You trusted me, but not knowing the potentials. You trusted my words, you trusted how I look. When you got me to go to America to fundraise, I was not equipped to do what I did there. It just happened. I look back and say, "I don't know who taught me to stand in front of people and talk.

I didn't even know you can learn these things. Whatever we were doing, it should be written on history books, it was the first time. Look at the fundraising that we did there, look at how people wanted that I come and talk. Everything just connected from each other to another one. Whereas it was a bigger world for me to think I can do fundraising. It was something that couldn't even exist in my own mind.

I went to the US to talk about SAFE. I didn't know I was doing fundraising. You said you prepared me to go and talk there. I didn't think I was going to talk in front of people listening to me sitting on chairs! I was assuming people will be sitting on their butts on the floor, more something like in South Africa. Or just in one house where there will be a couple of people coming to listen to me. Rather than I was talking to hundreds of people in these big places! We got so much done. But I don't think we both knew what we were stepping into. Certainly me - I didn't know.

Chapter 10

Nothing is impossible for me

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I remember the first time that I was going to America. You called me all the time in the middle of the night and I'll be crying after I drop the phone - I cannot believe it's happening.

Thinking about going to America gave me very emotional excitement. America meant far, meant a world that I don't know where it is. Being an American, it means you are posh, you live in another world where there's just money and where life's better. A world I think people perceive as more close to heaven. How am I going to handle that? You came and you brought a little bit to me on the basics of human. You crossed the race culture issues. But when you made that possible for me to go to America, I was hit with some reality. I was so excited, I didn't want to think about it. It was one of those things like, "You should not tell people - what if it doesn't happen?" Then it was coming closer, the ticket was there and oh gosh, I was still busy with SAFE. But whenever I think about it, "I'm going to America!" I'll tell people, they won't believe me. I was not the type of a person that can go to America. I didn't know what to do, how to pack, it was so stupid packing, you saw it - I packed towels and sheets and no warm clothes. Many people envy America in this country, black and white. I was going to be in the plane alone to America! It started to hit me that I'm going to be the first person that goes to America in my entire family. That last night going to America, it was like I cannot believe it's happening. On the way to the airport, I was numb. I couldn't think properly. I couldn't think of anything of how it's going to be because it went beyond my imagination, beyond anything that I can assume my ancestors has blessed me to do. There I come! Because I'm crazy, I'll stand in the plane and I'll go, "Yes!" And then I'll sit down and think, "Oh, they looking at me." I'm just sitting and thinking, "Oh, it's happening. Thank you, thank you, thank you." Then I calm down. I started to settle in the plane, then I started crying. I was thinking of the farm where I grew up, the times that I will sleep with no roof, and I will be thinking of so many things. Now I'm taking another step in my life, I'm getting to the world. I thought of the time that I ran away - can I compare the running away with this? The time leaving the farm to where I don't know, I didn't know Johannesburg; Johannesburg was America to me at that time. Now I'm taking another journey of not knowing where the end is. I don't know people in America, I don't know how it's going to look like, I don't know

if they got sand as we got. I don't know if they really got homes as we got. So it was a huge emotional time for me on the plane.

Then I got bored. The flight was too far. I slept, I woke up, I went to wash my face. I started to want to look good for America.

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The first thing I remember in New York, I saw black people and white in the train station, it was a new thing for me. They were so posh. Everything was so elegant and people were sitting and reading newspaper. It was so relaxed. I had very much the segregation in my mind of black and white. I was noticing so much of the things that were happening and the clothes they were wearing were really beautiful. Each and every person is minding his or her own business, reading a newspaper, as compared to the trains in South Africa where people will be talking all the time. I was very much observant of what was happening. When we got out of that train, it was amazing. The road was so huge. This is such a wealthy place. The cars that people were driving! I look across the street, I saw the flats. They were so beautiful, I was so amazed. I was like, "This is really another world for me." Totally I couldn't foreseen what I'm seeing. Oh, it was very funny to see huge cars. I remember that. We got in the flats in Brooklyn that I learn are supposed to be sort of like a type of a lower class - it was a huge posh place for me. I couldn't see that lower class. I still can't.

Ali, it's so hard to find poverty in America. I was just sitting with this is a very wealthy place. Does these people know that there are people that are really really in poverty? But that was nothing. When I started to move around America, I was just getting more and more angry.

I remember a guy that sharing the flat where I stayed. He was just very rich, throwing everything away, eat half and just throw the food. Everything was all over, it's like you can see the wealth. I just want to take this food and put it in a freezer and give it to someone else. I wanted to collect every single thing, even food, and take it home. Then the worst thing was when we pass these people in Pittsburgh that were throwing away the couches, I think they were pinkish color or cream. I wanted to pick up those setties and send them home. In New Jersey, people were throwing away sheets and all that. I still use those sheets in my house. I was just getting so angry and just wanting to go and talk to people and send a message in each and every post box and say, please, can you keep your things and just send them to

South Africa? Send them to SAFE, send them to any organization. I was so willing to give a list of organizations that people can send it. You don't have to buy special things. Things that for you are of no use, they are a huge use on the other side of the world.

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The soul in America was so very much on earning for the future. There was so much money that was taking away the importance of a human being, of connections, of feeding your soul, of living. Especial seeing these college students - they will be sitting and drinking - a very wealthy group of children. Sitting and drinking half beer, they put cigarettes in it, the food is just all over. I look at this as the future leaders because they very rich. They got money already from their parents, from their grandparents and the money that they work for. Their souls are disturbed now. How are they going to ever recover to gain their souls back? How hard is that going to be?

I saw Africa wealthy in terms of who we are as human beings. And I saw the poorest soul, that is America, yet very powerful in terms of money. I started to say, "Africa is wealthy, actually." I'm so thankful to be so wealthy as compared to those people. And I'm so sad to look at them this way.

Slowly slowly I started loving America. I started loving that people, in their own ways, were trying to touch other people. I started admiring you and Colby and Jill a lot. 'I could not imagine anyone who'll leave her or his comfort zone and go to the poor. I couldn't underestimate that. Everything is a comfort zone in America, as compared to what we got. We need to acknowledge that. Americans took so much to SAFE. Colby made a video and you and Jill helped organize places to talk. People gave us money and books and sheets and towels and clothes. I came home with eleven suitcases full of things for the women of SAFE.

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When I returned to South Africa, I immediately faced another challenge. You know, I believe people have to really try not to talk with anger. Anger can be a positive

thing because it can drive you to do good things, but anger can become dangerous, especially when you let it talk for you.

My challenge was I was invited to a farewell party of one of the ladies that was moving to Canada and she invited me. And her in-laws are the stronghold of the Democratic Party. I pick it up the atmosphere was not right the moment that we arrived there. We were only two black families. It was my family and Chickie, the domestic worker of that family's family. And Chickie got really lot of children - about 13. So we showed up and these families, it seems as if they're not used to black people. They needed to practice, which I really appreciate. A person needs to practice in learning other cultures. I believe I was chosen to teach them because I could deal with the situation.

But as we were sitting there, a friend that was very close to the family that invited us had a daughter and her name was Samantha. She started to talk to me when she heard about what I'm doing with SAFE. She said, "I am so angry of the people in government that say they care about people but they're driving this huge Mercedes Benz and BMWs and they flying all over. They earn lot of money, they got lot of money to go to parties, instead of taking this money and giving to the poor people. Can you imagine how much these Mercedes Benz cost?" She was going on and on and on and I was listening to her. At the beginning I was angry. Somehow I got to be in the middle stage and I started to say, "But Gertrude, here you have to really listen. This person, at this particular moment, she's your client. It's like she needs your counseling, it's like an abused person that is coming to you, being angry and before you can be able to talk to her, you have to understand where she comes from." I find that as a good way of dealing with a victim.

So I saw Samantha as a victim of apartheid standing in front of me judging everything and I felt she was really threatened with the new government. It was a rich child, a white South African, worried about the equality. Her parents were there, very close to her. They didn't say anything to interrupt, they were just listening, which makes me to feel that they were proud of their daughter. I think it's good that they can be proud of their daughter - it's they way that they raise her. She was telling me about how she's doing part time job at a restaurant in Hout Bay. Hout Bay is a very rich area. And she was telling me about the three black girls that are working in the same restaurant. She said, "They have to better their lives. They can go back to school and better their lives. They still young. Whenever they see a black person comes in the restaurant, they just look at them and say, 'Oh, surely

they're not coming from South Africa because if they were from South Africa, they couldn't afford this food of this restaurant." She said, "I keep on telling them they have to better their lives. They must go to night schools."

At this time of my life, I was busy dealing with MamXhaympi's daughter Thabisa that lost her father. And as Samantha was talking about many things, each and every thing that she was saying, it reflected back in my life. It reflected in my activities, it reflected in many clients that I have dealt with. In my personal life as well. I just totally felt she is bringing the hurt to my wounds. As always I refuse being angry by saying to myself, "I'm healed now. Or I'm working towards my healing and I'm not going to allow Samantha to hurt me again. I'm not going to allow you to continue hurting others because you are superior – you're white, you rich, you stay in Hout Bay, you in UCT, you are educated."

I said, "Samantha, I don't know if you want me to say anything here. If you want me to say something, you will let me know. But if you don't want me to say anything in this conversation, it's okay. I'm going to just listen to you – I enjoy listening to you." So she continues and she was smoking and smoking and she came to her second cigarette. She was going on and really angry and frustrated about the new government that is corrupt and not selling their Mercedes Benz and give money to the poor people. At the end, she said, "Gertrude, how do you feel about this because dealing with children that are abused, dealing with women that are abused, dealing with the poorest people, what do you think about this government that is driving big Mercedes Benz, having meetings all over, flying?"

I said to her, "Samantha. Are you complaining because the Mercedes Benz are driven by black people? Because driving a Mercedes Benz is not a new thing. Even your Dad is driving the biggest Mercedes Benz, the new model. Why is a Mercedes Benz and BMW suddenly a big issue? I don't even notice people passing me with a BMW even if I'm walking barefoot because I don't own a car – I don't have a car. It's theirs. And, in fact, those people are working for it. They're working for that BMW. I don't think you're really being realistic here."

I said, "Samantha, your anger is out of intimidation. You are intimidated and you're talking about things that you don't know. For instance, the three womens or the three young ladies that you're working with – do you really know what is happening in their lives? What if those poor kids are earning R300/month and with that R300, they have to look after their families including their moms. And with that R300, they have to make groceries, they have to pay school fees, they have to buy clothes

for their families, they have to buy electricity, they have to go to the same grocery shop that you're going to, which they're not having any discount. So, they have offered their lives for the other children to do better. That doesn't mean they have stopped dreaming, Samantha. That doesn't mean they don't want to do the things that you think they should be doing. But you don't know. How can you judge a person just by seeing them there? When they see these black people showing up in that restaurant, that doesn't mean they don't want to be like them. It's because they are stuck in a life that they can't come out of it. They're not educated to challenge life. They're not educated to challenge life and you are showing them every day that they can't challenge you. They were not given a chance to make a meaning in their lives.

"The other thing is this, Samantha, I think you talking about abused children, abused women. You really don't have a feeling of these people. Have you ever sit down and look at a child that has been raped now now, have you ever sit down and look at a child that has been raped by someone who has got AIDS? Have you ever sit down and talked to a woman that has been beaten and abused all her life? Have you ever sit down talking to someone that is dreaming but whose dreams are totally out – the way she was never given a chance? Because that woman was working for you to proceed in your dreams, to climb on top of your dream. I did that once, Samantha. It's a pity that your childhood has closed you in a little island in South Africa. Hout Bay is an island towards children. They stay there, they don't know what happens in the townships. They don't know about this abuse. They busy talking about violence in the country, they don't know that! They never interacted with the victims of this violence. They still closed in their little islands. Go to Durbanville, you find children are in their little islands. Go to Constantia, they are in their little islands. Samantha, you're a victim of your parents' little island. They have kept you there. Now you're a victim that is trying to come out, but your way of coming out is still a superior white South Africa that want to control things. You don't go out and meet the world and first be quiet and move and see what is happening. Then you can be able to talk. Right now you're talking out of your mind. You must try to sink the thoughts – go down to your heart. When you talk out of your heart, you will be able to know what is happening in South Africa, but I cannot listen to you because what you're saying, you're saying about what you're hearing. You're not saying about what you really know is happening. I will talk to you

Samantha, when you walk out of that island. Then we can talk. Because we will be in the really South Africa.”

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I was amazed Samantha listened to me. Her parents were around there and they also listened to me. I explained to her about the hurt. I said to her, "You know, at this point of time in South Africa, we're having a huge problem. We in a disturbing time of knowing what is the reason of black womens that are having lot of problems in the womb. And the Truth and Reconciliation has highlighted to us what happened - why are people so sick, their legs are sore, people are having problems with their womb and womens are really facing terrible times." I explained to her about Mama Xhaympi and other womens that I know are having this problem. I asked her if she does listen or watches the Truth and Reconciliation. She said no she does not because she believe Truth and Reconciliation programs are one-sided and I said to her, "Oh, then it's a pity. I won't say it's one-sided or not, but one thing that I can tell you is recently there was this knowledge that was shared to us about this guy that mix drugs to poison black women's womb, which was very disturbing." And I said to them, "I'm one of those people. I'm one of the victims of this guy and the previous government - not just only on that but I've been terrible terrible victimized by this. I'm only 33 and I lost my womb. The doctors find that my womb must be taken out from me because I was having a terrible time, which I'm still having. I'm having lot of operations and my legs are painning, it's a problem to me. That was done to protect you. That was done for you to walk on top of your dreams, to be able to be rich and to be free from black people in this world. My life was totally uprooted and defeated. But I cannot hate you because of that. That was done to protect you. But I refuse to listen to you saying these things and really be angry. I choose to talk to you about it, to highlight these little things to you. I think we had a good talk and I'm looking forward to our relationship and I believe it can work."

At the end, Samantha offered herself to know more about what I'm doing and she would love to work with SAFE in Hout Bay. I'm glad that I was angry but I didn't talk out of my hurt, or out of my anger. I'm glad that I saw Samantha as a victim in front of me, as a abused victim. I'm glad I could speak to her straight-forward because right now we are busy developing a friendship and she invited me to come to Hout Bay. She controls the UCT radio, so, she might give me a opportunity to go

and have a talk in UCT which will be great. And I won't be bossy to her and I just hope she won't be bossy to me. I know we're going to come up with a positive thing to heal our nation.

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When things started to pick up with SAFE, I was still the usual me, not like looking at numbers. I don't believe on have huge numbers to make an impact. I just started to think, "Okay, this is the walk we have walk with those women in SAFE. We got those women to go to school and do their grade 12. Now they done. So then, what?" Then I just have to take it in another step. Get the colleges around.

Believe me it was an impossible thing that anyone who's black can think of what I have done. I'm proud of that. I went to the Afrikaner College, Boland College. I just told them a little bit about what I do and I invite that guy to come and see SAFE and I told him how beautiful and dynamic those women are. I said need a scholarship for 18 women. I was not putting one to one, playing safe; I told him this is what I want. He said, "You must know you are going to pay."

I said, "Actually, that's the problem. We don't have money. But these guys are smart. They can do this. I met them when they had grade 7 - and they finished their grade 12. Doesn't that mean something?"

I said to him, "You know what I always do in life? I try so hard that history does not repeat itself. And I know if I don't find opportunities for these women to be acknowledged, that is going to make an impact on their children, it's going to make an impact on this community and that is going to make an impact on my life and on my children's life. It's going to come around and make a huge bad impact in the world. So I'm just doing what I can do in my space. And I know you got the access to change their lives."

The board of the college said we have to pay some money and they will give us a huge discount. So some of the money we raised in America went to pay part of their admission and a fee for their exams, then Boland College paid the rest. 18 women started in the program and 12 of them graduated. Zoleka was one of them, Zoleka did so good. That was the first time that the Boland College knew about an organization that was led by a black woman that was doing so good.

The other thing that SAFE did was get a couple of children into white schools around the area, paid for children to go to schools in good places. We bought

vitamin solutions and Pro-Nutro for women we knew with AIDS. At Christmas, we make sure we have food for people who don't have. At the beginning of the year, the township people put money together and at the end of the year they go and buy a lot of food and sheeps to slaughter and share amongst each other. So Boy and I will put money with these groups. At the end of December, we get all this food and right before Christmas, Zoleka, Tuliswa and Jacqueline have already identified the families that are really starving. Because I knew how it is on Christmas not to have food while people are rejoicing, we will go and share with them. Then, at the end of January, when we know people are starving in townships, the other food is going to be shared among those people.

SAFE also fought for the high school, the clinic and the police station to be brought to the township in Nomzamo. I worked so much to talk to the municipality to get the police station close to where they were needed because when people had to walk these distances to town to go and report their rape, they will be raped on their way. So I was active in that. The station is in Nomzamo now, there's a clinic there and the high school as well. In Grabouw as well, I worked to get a school inside that township.

So SAFE was really a success. I carried on counseling programs, getting people to go to schools, locating whatever education that I can ever have. The only thing I could not succeed was, if I introduced people to something, get them to go to a college, I could not keep up, asking, "Are you doing it? How are you doing?"

I see it as, "I made an opening in your life. You must run with it." Because this is what happened with me. You give me a chance, you just give me opening, I run with it. In my life, I couldn't do what I haven't experienced. I can't push people to anything that I know it's impossible. But I know nothing is impossible for me.

Chapter 11

When the hill is steep

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When I heard about the people who has killed Mrs. Brown, it's the children or the grandchildren of the people that was working for her. Those grandchildren heard the story about their granddad working for Mrs. Brown and they see she's got so rich and owns farms. They thinking, "If Mrs. Brown's husband paid my granddad and my dad well, I shouldn't have been in this poverty today." So that anger made them hate Mrs. Brown and not see her as she's human. It does not justify what they did. But Ali, look at Thania and Evelyn; they're facing this life today. South Africa is free. And they have to compete with the white children that are coming from privileged, privileged, privileged houses, white children that had money that was invested before they were conceived! And my girls, they don't have money. And when they hear about how those white children get to be so rich, that might bring hatred slowly to their hearts.

Mrs. Brown was living in town in Dodrecht and the killers were also living in town, in the location. They first went there to see the property when Mrs. Brown was gone with the family to Durban for the running of horses. They stole a TV and some other things, but the police managed to bring the things back.

In Durban, one of their horses has won a lot of money for them. And those killers came back to look for that money. They thought she's got it because they know she's like the head of the family that is still alive. They came to look for it. And they found her. And the only thing they found of the money was R300. I think they thought she's hiding it and they think, "She's going to die any minute, but she still don't want to share money." That hate of, "You discriminated our forefathers, you're still winning money today. You still keeping for your grandchildren. Damn. Look at me! You spoiled my whole life! My children's, my children to be born, my grandchildren." That anger. The fact that they found R300 and they still did not want to take R300, they still want to kill her and cut her into tiny pieces. That's a terrible anger! It's like, if I kill somebody like that, I'm dead too. I don't see myself as a human being any more. I mean cutting someone that you know, to see blood flowing! Maybe if it's a stranger, but Mrs. Brown that they know! Their forefathers, their fathers worked for this family and they still decided to kill her like a bird, like when you cut chicken you're going to braai! That's terrible. That's a tragedy.

So I don't want my children to look at any Afrikaner, any white South African and say, "You have stole my mother's money, my granddad's money, and everything." I don't want to build that to my children, but I have to be carefully teaching them about the past, their forefather's past, because at the end, they might think, "Black people are stupid. Why didn't you compete with these guys?" They must know what happened, but carefully not pick up hate on it.

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Ali, when we went back to see the farm, in Dodrecht, did you notice when we were moving around those houses where I showed you I grew up, there was an old guy that was lying there with the children just opposite that house? This guy was lying there, I don't think he's that old. I could see he's full of sickness and he can't walk anymore. Who did that to that person? Who did that? If you look down, you can see he's dirty, he's gone. It's just bones covered with thin flesh. His eyes are red and gray. You look at his fingers, you find they have cramped. You look at his veins, you see he's totally out, he's just waiting to die. I look deeper to this guy and see that young boy that was this human being. And who targeted that young boy to die like this? And how did he feel? Did the Brown family did that? When did he started working for them? Did the other white guys that he worked for, did they do that? Didn't they feel like they can take just R100 to just help this person? They did not feel that. Maybe if they did have a fair method of paying him, I was going to have an answer somewhere, I won't be so confused and so distracted in my spirits. I think apartheid has not died, it's still alive. It's actually stronger than before because now it's clearly economical. And what keeps the world going - it's money. Why are people controlling other peoples' lives? Why are people wanting to control a human being from that second that person is born to the second that person go under the ground and being buried? Why must we be like that? Why must we hurt other human beings like that? Because you don't just hurt that one person. A person is not just born today and die tomorrow - few of them that does that. A person stays about 70-100 years. Which means when you oppress that person, you oppress anyone that has come close to that person, as a family, as grandchildren - as generation of that one human being.

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It takes a lot of energy to deal with all the anger in South Africa. My husband was a great teacher as well because he will teach me about anger. He will say, "Love, learn to have a slower movement when the hill is steep. When you go to the other side of the hill, don't roll. Walk slowly because if you roll fast and think things are cool, you are going to die. This road is for western guys, for white guys. They did not just create this road and have maps and do everything for you. They did it for themselves. Don't stay where they're putting you. But be in between because the time is not right yet. Do you think, Ali, if we can say what we felt in past, do think we will be happy in this country? Starving will be more. Poverty will be more. In many ways we always think: Western has brought so civilized life to us. But who really did this? Who really worked? I look at monuments like the Kruger monument and the statues that was built by our people, by our forefathers, to make other people happy. I look at the beautiful buildings that were built for another race and do you know whose sweat is that? That was built with the sweat of a black man. That makes me to love this country more and more. I am very proud to be an African. Whatever difficulties we have faced, we are rising above them. We have survive the torture of our country. We have passed the test of slavery.

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I was in the group that fought to get a high school for the township, Nomzamo. The school was builded in Nomzamo and the plot that I wanted for SAFE was just below the high school. I dreamed of a huge center for SAFE. I was working on getting land, so I was really making a progress on my dream. I wanted to walk out of SAFE, seeing this center being there. People were like, "Name it 'Gertrude Nonzwakazi Center'." Then I said, "No, it's not mine. It must be called the Women's Center, that it's owned by women."

So it was just going to be a beautiful picture. Even then, the students will come to SAFE. Those that got parents that live in the Eastern Cape were sent here to their aunties to come and get a better education. Now sometimes they got some quarrels between those families. They don't got food. They will come to SAFE to have bread or whatever in their lunchtime and go to school. I will assess this and Zoleka will assess this and Jacqueline and Tuliswa will assess if it's true what they're telling us. When we see it's true, then we will always have some food for them when they come to go to school and they will come and eat with us.

Also, we will pay other children's school fees. Siphokazi, who is a teacher there at the high school, will be the one who tells me about these really situations of those children. She will say who needs school fees, who doesn't. So SAFE was growing so broad. So much is needed in the area and it's the only operating office. So I find myself getting into so many things, that made me so sick, Ali, it made me very sick and it made me feel very lonely, I have to make so much decisions - and suddenly I'm a hero of so many things. And people are trying to take advantage, oh people are taking advantage.

I came in contact with that a lot when I sent large numbers of women to do the Heldeberg College. SAFE sent those women. I made the decision, but SAFE sent the women, then we paid for them. These women were so amazed - to them, it was my money, but it was their money, for them. Immediately, people were applying, getting their children, getting their application to come to me. They were thinking I'm this millionaire. The more I explain it's SAFE's money, for them, SAFE was me. In a way, SAFE was me, but that was not my money. I'll say, "No, that was not my money. It's SAFE's money, this money come from America intended to help people.

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When I was in America the second time, I had this dream. It said, "You are going to die because there's so many women that envy you, you're blocking them to grow - they're so threatened by you." In the dream, I'm given the choice to debate the issue. I said I am willing to die because I love women so much. I want them to grow, I want to see them rise up, I want them taking a stand on Earth, in the world or something.

Dying means mean things. Dying might mean that I'm going to die in the field of NGOs for other people to rise up and take on the world. It was also like my girls were part of the women that were threatened. It was like if I keep on like what I'm doing, my girls will want to live my way. I needed to die, I needed to be where I'm at now, to lose the focus of being so powerful.

I have challenged so many peoples' thinking when I started SAFE. So many people wanted to start things in small ways in rural areas, where really life matters. They started things and I advised them to go on. Later, they started to see me as a threat or they started to be jealous of what I was doing.

I hated that competition, but after a while, I started to see they are victims. So I think I needed to die for some reason. Not death as being buried. But I know when

I had that concession in the dream, I did say yes, I'm willing to die. I got sick because I needed to pay attention to my calling, I didn't get sick because I needed to die.

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Everybody around me, when I returned from the US, even the ladies at SAFE, could see I was sick. They were like, "Sisi, please, leave this." I was swelling in my face. I remember one day I came to SAFE and my sunglasses couldn't fit on my face. I don't know what is happening. I got in and I'm like, "My sunglasses are small." I always smile, I always make a thing to be a joke.

I say, "Guys, suddenly my sunglasses can't fit me, they press me like crazy. I'm having this terrible headache." They're like, "Sisi, you've been having this terrible headache for months now. Look at your forehead, look you're so dark, you're swelling."

I went to the mirror. Ali, I look horrible - Zoleka still talk about it and she cries - and I'm like, "Okay, I'm just going to do these meetings and then I promise you, I'm out. I'm not going to come to SAFE anymore."

They said, "We don't want to see you here. You're scaring us." I went to do my meetings - can you imagine I look horrible? But I mean, my spirit was not defeated. I was talking and smiling to people and I was just going on. I went to see a neurologist and he was like, "Gertrude I don't want you to go around SAFE, I don't want you to do anything for anyone. I want you to be at home." Guess what? I didn't go to SAFE because I had to drink all these tablets, but I was working, I had papers, I had the phone next to me. I had faxes all over the bed and I was handling everything of SAFE.

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When I was in America, I spoke about dancing in your space. I gave this talk to the mothers in Magnificat High School, a girl's school in Cleveland. I said the only thing that made me to be who I am today, to be able to stand in front of them and not be intimidated by them being white and being in another country; the only thing that kept me going, sleeping in subways and still loving people, it's because I managed to pull away from all the toughness that life will put in my way. I managed to pull away and be in my space and be able to dance in my space. You can still love a person and

maintain your own space; you're the master of your space. When things get to be too tough, when things get to be too beautiful, I go and dance in that space.

When I was telling these women about keeping their unique space, and I ask if they have any questions. They said to me, "I'm sure your children are the best." I said I don't know about that, but I just know they're great. I told them I got two girls and my son and I love them dearly, they're my friends in everything that I do. They said you have two girls? They would love to see Evelyn, they would love to have her come to America. When they said this, it was like a joke. The principal insisted that she must come, but I was like, no, it's just one of the promises. It's not real.

But I got home and everything started rolling. Theresa was serious, these guys were serious. Evelyn was like, "No, I'm not going. Not alone. Unless Thania goes."

Then Thania said, "I would love to go." Now Theresa and the principal of Magnificat had to work on getting another school and another scholarship for Thania.

When Theresa and Jim came to fetch the girls, it was happening, I could not believe it. It was starting to be scary. It was starting to challenge me on the word 'trust.'

When I say I trust a person, what does it mean?

On that day, Boy and I were on top of the world. Everybody knew. Our children are going to America! Theresa and Jim and some girls from SAFE drove in another car. We drove with the girls to the airport. We told them how much we don't know what is going to be happening as from that time when they get in the plane. I told them how unique they are in my life. I said this is the step of God telling me to let go. I was crying. I knew how far America is.

When they were walking away in the airport, I watched them go and I said, "You go girls, you go and take on the world. This is the first step. It's very far where you guys are going to. Right now I don't know what you guys are going to get yourselves into. I just pray you will take whatever hardship that comes on your way. Right now I just trust Theresa and Jim."

Evelyn and Thania are the centre of my universe. I just could not believe I was letting my big girls to go and be with other people. Boy was crying, he said, "I cannot believe I just let my only two girls to go and be so far. I don't even know where they're going to."

They going with Americans and whites. This is a big step. We were tested about what we've been teaching people about trust, love, that there's no difference on race, we're all humans. And my girls did it! This meant a lot to me. And I think when I

was sick, I just knew they got so many people in life that love them. Somewhere somehow, I knew they would never sleep out and be in poverty like I was.

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I went to the doctor one day for a check up, just after the girls left, and he admitted me immediately to be prepared for surgery. Suddenly, I was so close to death, Ali, I was so close to death. There was one day that I totally know I was somehow out of my body, my spirit was somewhere and I was just asking questions like how big God is. I was totally floating, I was under a tremendous pain. When I woke up that day, it was like my brain was moving, when I turn this way, it's like my brain is loose. I was so scared.

My face was totally swelling, I had a operation in my back, I was bleeding. Zoleka came to see me. I said, "Zoleka, please help me to turn to the other side." She said, "Oh, please don't do this to me," while she's helping me to turn. I said, "Zo, just pull my legs and put it that way and get slowly this pillow to turn on the other side." She said, "You're bleeding! No! I can't do this! Please don't make me to do this!"

That was a level of being powerless in my life, that was what being powerless meant to me. I knew this is only God that can get me out of this. I was just negotiating with God on the level of saying, "If I got another chance." Deep inside me my mind was telling me the reasons for dying. My brain felt like it's going to collapse. People were giving me books that talk about sicknesses. I didn't read them. I didn't want to know what I did wrong to be where I am.

It's a scary moment to smell death. When I think of my moments, my life shocks around the death, they are so similar and you do have that similarity of death smell. You feel it's close, you know it can happen anytime, that you can lie down and not wake up. Death has got nothing to do with pain - it's not your pains that are going to get you to death, it's skipping levels of life. It's pulling away from your body and being a spirit. The chances that you have to play here, they gone.

When the time comes that you threatened by death, there's no time to blame another person, rather than to acknowledge and be thankful. I don't think there's time before the last breath to say I hate my mom or my dad for doing that to me. I think it's always about, "Did I spend enough time with my children? Did I spend enough time with people that I love? Did I see the opportunities that were put on my way, by God, by the universe, you name it? Did I take advantage of that?" If you reach heaven, or wherever, I don't think God will say to you, "Okay, let's see, did you

do this and this and this and this? I think he will just say, "Look, this is your life. Did you accomplish all what you went to on Earth to do? How do you feel about it?" I think it always goes back to you, it doesn't go back to, "Did your mom dump you in the farm?"

It's a scary thing to know really these are your chances here. It's a scary thing to look at and say, "I have allowed so much of other people's lives to determine my horizon." This is my space.

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That day, when I woke up coming slowly after that, I said, "Now, if I'm going to die, the angel of God will come and say, 'Look back. what did you do?' I won't say I did anything for my children." In my life, I was driven by helping other people, I don't know where it came from. As a little girl, Ali, I will teach people about the New Testament and the Old Testament. Being in Crossroads, being pregnant with Evelyn, I've been always so wanting to be with people and motivating them, "You can do it!" In my life, I can't say I was ever fully with my children, ever fully with Boy, ever fully just us, rather than talking about what another person does there and how do we help.

I looked back and I said I want to be with my children. I said, "God, give me just one chance, just one chance to go back and work." I'm going to work with my children. I used to be scared of the words saying, "Make money, I want to make money, I want money to work for me, for my children, for the people that I love."

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When I was finished with my surgeries, I went to Debbie, a psychologist. At this point, SAFE was overwhelming for me. I was so stressed. I was really looking for people that can help me to get a nun to help me to run SAFE. I could see that SAFE was getting heavy, there was something that I don't understand about myself, about my potential anymore. I was very tired. I was just like, "I want to pull away, I want to just be me, I want to have my life." So I went to Debbie and I keep on saying, "I gave myself out, I want to be filled now. I don't want to give anymore, I want to gain." So I wanted to get them to help me go to workshops, just that I can go back to be me.

I said, "I am empty." As a psychologist, she was putting together all my frustrations, including my past of growing up alone and my work with SAFE. She said, "Gertrude,

this depression has been long long. You're not just stressed. You are depressed." That was a new thing for me. I never heard the word 'depression' before. She said, "This is not stress, I need you to go and see Dr. Kelly." She called and said, "I really need her to see Dr. Kelly as soon as possible." They made a date and then she will ask me, is that date right for me? At first, I refused to have some of the dates because I still had lots to do with SAFE. Debbie said, "Gertrude, this is about you. Cancel everything and go." I went. The anger in me was starting to win. After Dr. Kelly heard everything that I was saying he booked me for the depression clinic. I was at the point where I hated any poor black woman in a township. I had huge doctors' bills and no money to pay because everything I ever have, I put into SAFE. I said, "My God, I hate them. They will suck you in. You go in as a fat cow, they suck you and then they waiting for the next one. Oh my gosh." I hated poverty. If I did not go to clinics where I could be away from SAFE for weeks, I was just going to be an angry person. Anger gets to control you, your soul is so controlled by anger. And anger's got a way. It's not like I'm going to be just angry and shouting at people all over, but I'm going to be angry by just wanting money, money, money, money. Anger can be very smart. Somewhere somehow, my sickness got hold of me in the right time. He told me I was crying. I vaguely remember that time of my life. If I remember something, I want to shut it immediately, it hurts me. I saw him that first day on Wednesday and he booked me to that psychiatrist hospital for Sunday that week.

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I went into the hospital and Dr. Kelly really wanted me to sleep. I was fighting the sleep. He just wanted me to be alone. But guess what? I started counseling other patients there. I started counseling people on marriage in my room. When I left there, I had clients, people were calling me to come and do counseling in their homes of the marriage and so on. Boy mets them, they sent me music. They think I'm their angel. They've been touched by an angel. The first week, I didn't really look at myself being there. I saw so much people that were really depressed. Even at that point, I didn't understand I'm depressed, I didn't know what it means for me to be depressed. I was still walking, everything was fine.

Whenever the drugs is out of my system, I would call to check on SAFE. I'm like, "Hi Zoleka!"

She's like, "Sisi, I'm going to drop this phone. You're not supposed to call." I felt so guilty, I could feel I'm failing. I knew Zoleka is capable of doing things without me, she works with the computer more than I can ever know. She was capable of balancing the work and Jacqueline is the master of counseling. Tuliswa is good with the youth. But I could not convince myself. I felt like I'm disappointing them. I started SAFE, now I'm putting it on their shoulders, I'm not supposed to be sick, not me, I'm not a person that's supposed to be sick, I'm not human when it comes to be sick."

So I was counseling people really that first week. I was supposed to go home the following week on Tuesday.

When the time came, I started crying. I was just crying and Dr. Kelly said, "I'm booking you in again for another two weeks. I just want you to go and eat and be in your room. I don't want you to counsel people." But he's such a gentleman, he's sweet. So I will listen to what he said. I started to pull away by that and just be in my room and I was starting to sleep. Really, I just wanted to sleep and to sleep. And I will cry and cry and sleep and cry. Slowly I didn't want to see people. My room was dark all the time, I didn't want any light. Right through, I just wanted it must stay dark. If there's a light, it was disturbing me, I will feel irritated, I will be mad. But if it's dark, I feel calmer. My room was dark all the time when I was there.

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Dr. Kelly made me realize I have been depressed long back. When I met you, I was depressed. When I started SAFE I was depressed. So what is really a depression? When did I started to have the depression? When did I started to have the symptoms of things? I had those things long back. How many times that I was depressed about something and my mind block it? If something is hurting too much, I can't do something about it, I block it.

Being sick, so many doctors have asked me about my heart. "When did you started to find you have a heart problem?" my doctors wanted to know. I didn't know. I couldn't say when was it. I'll say I was having this pain since my left-hand arm was broken when I was 9 years old. I will have these pains that are like they're running from my heart, my veins are having pains and I'll just hold it close and continue. Was that a heart starting to have problems? I don't know.

When Boy met me, both of us wanted me to have a operation that can fix my arm. The doctors were really curious to do it, but they looked at it and said, "Can you remember exactle how it happened?" I couldn't go deep and remember that because I block it so much. I block so many things around my life. I escape the pain. I couldn't go back to it and so the doctors said, "Gertrude, this thing is going to want even the shoulder to be fixed. And there's some connection around your heart. So it's a big operation we're looking at. It might be fixed right so you can use your arm, or it might be a scar, something that you will always have pain, more than you're having now."

When I was pregnant, my heart will be so tired, this arm will be so sore, there will be many times that I can't lift up anything. But I have to lift some things, I have to build the shack, I have to do the work. Boy will rub me at the back and say, "Look, you are so blue here. We have to do something," and he'll take me to the doctors. Before I had Boy, I had this blueness on my shoulder, I had those pains, I couldn't tell anyone. In my life, I was not allowed to be sick.

When I got out of the jail in Krugersdorp, I was sick from sitting on the cement for three days. There was no tissue in my body that was not hot. I was shivering, I was having headaches, nothing that was not sore around my body. I was not allowed to be sick. Mr. Parker dropped me off and there were dishes all over, the house was a mess. Everything was crazy, a mess, and I have to work. I remember they noticed that I was sick and they said, "Okay, when you're finished with this, you can go and lie down." But as I said, I blocked so much of my feelings, I can't remember really these things.

I started having that pain on my leg. I started limping and my whole leg was swelling, my feet was swelling; I was not allowed to be sick. If I got sick, who's going to feed me? Who's going to bring food to me in bed? Do I have a bed? Am I allowed to lie in the bed? No, those things were not for me. I could never say to a person I feel a pain; it was not a language that could come out of my mouth. It was in my mind, yes. It was in my body, in my spirits, everything, but I couldn't share it with anyone. It was for me to keep it.

Now, when I got sick, Ali, I feel guilty to be sick. I don't believe myself. I know I'm sick, I know I'm feeling sick of this and this and this, but I have to find out, "Am I really sick? Can I really tell people this?" For me, being sick is when you're really sick and maybe you're about to die. Or when you have a operation. But even when I had my operations, I had my uterus removed, I had the Caesars with my children,

I'm looking for any painkiller to get me going. The people at Boy's work, they were like, "What is she doing?" Boy's like, "That's my wife. She doesn't want to lie down." I can't, I can't, it's so deep in me. I have to work, I can't lie down. In my sleep, I fight sleeping, I fight lying down. I have to wake up. I'm afraid my children are going to look at me like, "Mommy was just a sleeping mom." I feel guilty. Now, after all this trauma, my body is really pulling me down. I was just a zombie. I feel like my mind is blocking, I can't think anymore. I just have to go and sleep. But I'm fighting that.

Chapter 12

Dancing in my space

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I was very confused to leave SAFE. I was feeling guilty to leave people like MamXhaympi. I couldn't see the little change that I did for them. I wanted this big change. We were still working for the Women's Center by the high school.

Ali, I've been sick for a long time, but I started collapsing. I was always aware that there's something not working right with me. Even when they took away my womb, the doctors will always say, slow down, slow down. But a heart is never sick - your heart is never sick, your dreams are never sick. So I was pursuing that and I keep on saying, "I'm not going to stop, I'm not going to stop, I'm going to never stop." Even when I was under any blade, I never feel like I was going to stop. I just said, "I'm going to change my direction."

When I was collapsing, I told my friend Colleen, "Colleen I want to leave SAFE. There are times when I totally don't want to talk to people. I find this thing is getting bigger for me and I'm just looking for someone to take it over. It's getting too much now. I'm needed all over and I have to still operate in the office. The women that are working at the office, they still want me to motivate them all the time. I feel I'm giving out a lot and I'm not getting it back." I was really frustrated financially.

We spoke and spoke and she said to me, "Gertrude, what I'm sensing: you want to leave SAFE, you want to make money, to go and make money."

Still a huge part of me was in SAFE and how am I going to do this?

I said, "Yeah"

She said, "You need to make those women understand that they need to take on their lives. It's not your life. Look at how many South Africans that got a position to do what you're doing, that have influence. You have nothing really. You have no influence. You need to grow first in order to help other people, you need to be financially secure. Not that you can completely be financially secure - people that are billionaires never feel like they financially secure - but you need to be really financially secure to be able to help other people. Just leave that, man, it's not your life. You have worked yourself to where you are. Look at the farm girl that has been in America! You and Ali have did good."

Other people that I spoke to, Ali, they were just like, "Gertrude, how can you think you can teach people to fish when you cannot fish yourself? You can fish, but you're

not fishing. You got weapons to fish but you're not fishing and you're teaching other people how to fish. What an example is that?"

At this point, this was giving me a really huge depression; it made a big impact on my sickness. I could feel it. I can see now when I look back. I will take people to go and see SAFE, to meet the women in the office, like I needed their approval to say it's okay to leave. I did get support of people. They've seen what I couldn't see what I did. Those women from Grail were so impressed with our work and now they're going to take SAFE over. They loved our work. Everybody that I have spoken to feels that.

I made a decision of leaving SAFE, though it was hard. Everybody that I spoke to was supportive of me. Everybody. Now I'm trying to recover and I'm still trying to fish. I got a permission to lie on the bed. I do. But I still feel like I need to earn money, I need to go see what is happening around. I can't depend on other people, I just want to do something. I don't want to feel like sickness has got me. When it's got me for some days, I will lie in bed and be a patient. But I love to be me, I love not to be controlled by anything, not even my body.

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I think SAFE did contribute a lot to my depression. As I said earlier, I started something that I didn't know it was way big. I didn't know that counseling people, I needed to be counseled myself. Working with people and peoples' problems, they appreciate who you are, but they need more. It's not easy to work with people that are in a huge financial need and you as a person, you also got your own needs. Because when you helping people, people don't see you as a human, they see you as some entity, as something that doesn't have life. I think I opened myself too much. I didn't have my own life. People had my phone number, my cell phone number, my home number and they will just show up anytime. Sometimes they don't want to go to the office because they didn't want to be seen by those people that are working at SAFE because they're worried they're going to talk about them. I don't live in the township, so they will choose to come to me. At the beginning, it was okay for me. Traditionally, you must have a time for another person, which is good and bad - at that point it was bad for me. People will show up and I feel I have to entertain them. I make tea and have time with this person and listen. I started not to have time for myself at all.

Sometimes, Boy and I, we will be called in the middle of the night, people are fighting. In the police station, they will call me if there's a woman who's been raped. So it was hard, Ali. It was very hard. And it did contribute a lot to my depression. I have to be a fundraiser, I have to make sure the staff is trained, I have to have time with the people that they're volunteers with SAFE and hear their situations and be able to counsel them to motivate them, to be motivated to be around people, to fill their needs and also to keep educating myself, I still have so much to learn. I got to be so recognized by people, I didn't want to go to the mall. I got so tired to see people. And sometimes I will feel like I just want to look down, I don't want to lift up my eyes, so it will be like I didn't see them. But I'm the first one to feel guilty and say, "Hi. How are you?"

Also I didn't know how to get people that are capable of running SAFE in terms of funds and business. I needed to pay them. It was like I had this huge extra family that I had to run and extra children and cousins all over, that did not think I got life. It's a dangerous thing when you do that. I'm feeling bad that I didn't have a counselor for myself. I accumulated too much stress. And I was taking peoples' lives very personally. I'll come home and I'll tell Boy, "Oh, I must be so thankful to God we're eating, I went to this house that didn't have food and the children, how they look like." I'll be talking about it all the time and say we need to be so thankful, we got so much, we're so rich. It's very hard to work with people that are in basic, basic needs. I think it's a hardest thing that anyone can ever get involved in.

If I want to go back to counseling, I don't want to go back to that level. I want to take another level. I'm aware of other levels now. I think I did my part on that level. I don't want to go back there. And if I ever want to go back there, I think I will be putting my life in a huge risk.

But I have to tell you a secret. Do I feel really like that? I don't feel really like that right now. I feel that way in my head, but not in my heart. SAFE is still very much in my heart, those ladies are still there. For example, when I'm driving from Siphos school, every time when we come home, my car is full of women at the back. I pick up the domestic workers as they walking home. I'm just thinking for them to save that taxi money, because I know they need that bread and I find myself asking, "How do you work, how is your madam, how is these things?" I find I just want to be sort of like helping. So I don't feel that way, but in my head, I know, I really don't want to go back. It will kill me.

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I want to go back to dancing in my space. This is your space, Ali. This is the only chance that you got in this time in your life. This is my space. Whatever I do, it's got nothing to do with any other person.

I've been so pushed around by so much circumstances, I forgot some of the potential, fundamental things that I needed to do because I chose to be a mother. I don't want to die, my children being poor. I don't want my children to be worried about this. I don't want to go that way. I want them to live their lives fully. And I want to explore all my corners in my space. And make a success of that.

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SAFE is part of my calling, but for a certain time. I think everything that we do, it's part of our mission or calling, but we hold on and we don't move. We want to make it perfect, to end up owning it, not giving it to the mission, the way it has to be run. I gave SAFE over to Grail and it will continue without me now. It has to continue without me.

The part of my calling I'm in now - you remember I said I feel like I'm stuck now? I think I'm finding the next step on my calling. I feel like I'm between runnings away, like after I came back from Queenstown, before I left the farm to Krugersdorp. And I feel passionate inside me. My calling now is being a motivational speaker and do intercultural communication. I actually think I'm on this Earth for that. When I started SAFE, I wanted to do that, but I had to go through SAFE like a first step to understand some ways of people. I'm finding now I'm drawn to work with people that got money. Before I was very much drawn to working with people on the ground, but it comes with lots of payment. It comes with the physical drain. Ali. They are the women that can kill you with their eyes. They know life. Many people learn life by going through educations, big institutions. The women on the ground know life through living.

The direction of poverty and of domestic abuse took SAFE. I got drawn and drawn and drawn to them. I even feel if SAFE would have stayed the way I had it in my soul, I wouldn't have got so stressed. I wouldn't have got so sick. The powers of poverty got me to take a direction that I knew it was not me. I knew it was not the way I wanted, but I'm thankful that I did that. I still believe SAFE is still going to bring people together. The world is more thirsty in the same direction that is my

thirst. So I'm looking at SAFE bridging the gap still. I still got so much work to do. Not like I'm saying I'm the Jesus to save the world, but I feel like what I wanted long years ago is still not there. There's still a field for me. But physically, financially and I can't say mentally because I think all the time, but I think somehow I need to be fed. Spiritually, I really need a feeding.

I know now, you can't think you can grow with everybody. When you got 10 Rand, you can't think another person has to have 10 Rand as well - it doesn't work like that. Other people are satisfied having 2 Rand. So now, are you going to stay and wait for that person to be satisfied to have 10 Rand? I believed that all the time and now I think that's bullshit. Now I think, if people want to stay in the township, Ali, it's their problems. I got my ambitions, I got my dreams - I have to live them.

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When Julie met me, she met me in a mission, she didn't meet me waiting for people to help me. I haven't let go. When Ntombise and Nozabalise helped me to run away from the farm, I was in a mission. When my sister got to help me to run away from the farm the first time to go and look for my father, I was in a mission. When those teachers in Dodrecht, in the school, wanted to adopt me, I was in a mission. I mean, I got at school, I didn't do one full year in a class, I was always curious to know what is the next thing. When you met us, we were not like any ordinary black South Africans, we were not in the township. We were in South Fork. It was called a gray area at the time. People were like, "Oh you live in South Fork." I mean South Fork is a big place in Strand. I think that's what make people to recognize us, they know we're not just waiting for any handouts. We're working. Many people recognize that on me.

So I go. I go and I fail. And I go and I look at my failures and I just polish them and go back. Or I just say to the issue, "Okay, you stay there, I failed. You stay there till I think about you." And I go and then after a while, I pick up all the tools on my way and I go back and just look, "Okay, this is why I failed this thing. I can still do this. This is what I didn't know."

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I always wonder how would it be, in my own life, to be upstairs, to have a second floor, and just say, "Sipho, bring mommy cup of tea." Or just go down the stairs in the morning, in winter where the house is warm all over, it's breakfast, it's the smell

of that house. I wonder how is it to go and just take out cereal and just pour it, you're not worried about how much you're using. And the children come out yawning and come out from comfortable beds. Even if they go to school, they're being protected by their parents, that there's money in their pockets. I wonder how is that life? I wonder how is that life of picking a comfortable carpet, sitting and relax, have a book to read, relax and know I'm not wasting time, I'm not being lazy when I'm reading. I wonder how is it to know there's money invested somewhere that is working for you while you're sitting reading that book. And I wonder how do you feel when you're in that life, how do you feel when you know, "I've got a granddad who somehow put money somewhere for me." I just think that's a great life. Who would not envy that? And that life is white.

I was looking at my little girls and my Sipho and I'm like, "There's no money for you anywhere." There's no money for you. There's no money invested for you anywhere. There's no money. There's nothing, nothing, nothing for you somewhere. And so I have to do what I can for you to be able to do that for your grandchildren and children one day. The only way I have, to make sure you're educated.

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Julia Rockman, I met her through you in Williams College on the first trip to America. Then she came to South Africa and she really fell in love with our family. Just few days after we met Julia in Cape Town, she was robbed and Boy immediately get in the car, go and solve the problem. She was really terrified. From there we started bonding with Julia and her parents were very thankful with that. We will try to follow her, just make sure that she's safe. Before she left that year, she knew that the girls were coming to Cleveland and she arranged that they come and see her family.

When her parents saw my children, they just loved them. They were like, "You did a good job, Gertrude, your children know exactly what they want." They wanted the girls to stay to finish the year, but Evelyn was homesick.

When they saw they were not going to stay and they saw their results in the American schools, the Rockmans said, "We love your children, we want them to have the best schools. Find the best school in Cape Town, we will pay for it." We went to find the best school in our limitation. We were thinking 15,000 Rand per annum? That's too much. We'll send the information to them and they said, "No."

So we got to the 20,000 per annum, 25,000 per annum, till we got to this International School of Cape Town. Julia knew there was an International School in Cape Town so she said go to that. They chose the International School. We were like, "It's expensive!" And Julia's dad, Mark Rockman, he's so quiet. He called and he said, "Gertrude I want to tell you that we want to pay for the girls to go to the International School." Oh gosh, we cried and cried and cried. We couldn't believe it. Our kids were going to get the best education. We were so thankful and thankful

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So when the girls returned, we moved closer to Cape Town and they started school at the International School. Siphos started at Wynberg Boys. I was really depressed at the time, I was feeling so much lonely. I'm an active person and I didn't really know much people around here. People that I knew were from NGOs and I didn't want to be in contact with them. When I was picking up the girls from school, I met another mother and she told me about the International Women's Choir. She said, "You would love it and I know your personality will fit in on that." So I called the director, Gina, and she said, "We'd love you." I told her I'd been in the Libertas Choir and she invited me to observe. But the first day, I was singing second soprano. The choir practices at the American School in Tokai. I was amazed with this school where they practice. It's a great school and down down to earth people. These Americans were so free, so connecting. A week or two later, I told the principal I would love to see the school and she gave me a tour. She asked, "Do you have children?" I told her I got two girls and a boy. She said, "We would love your kids to be here!" I said, "I would love my son to be here!" I took Siphos for an interview and they fell in love with him. They invited him to start sixth grade there at the American School. Why am I so blessed that this is happening to me? I don't know. But I know I have had many successes in my life and around SAFE. In anything that I have ever done, I still believe, you do something good for a person, the universe smile, your ancestors smile, your guides smile, your angels smile and you have a payback that you can never thought exists. You do the possibles, God does the impossibles. I didn't know when I started SAFE that I needed money to start SAFE. God made it possible that you guys came and give me the knowledge. You made sure that I go to America. From that little time that I started when I met with Lindiwe - there's so

much benefit in my life! My book is about to be written down. Do you think if I didn't take that step, if I didn't do what was possible for me at that time, the impossibles could have been there? No. You block your own blessings when you don't take a step. And there are loads and loads of blessings. God love you, but he wants you to know you can do it. Fear cannot control you. If I was overwhelmed by fear, I wouldn't have taken these steps. If I was playing too safe and saying, "I don't have money, how can I help another person?" I would have stayed in that corner and all those women of SAFE would have stayed where they are. That's playing safe. I just live radical and the radical blessings are on my way every time.

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I believe what is happening right now, I'm standing like a wall between my ancestors and my descendents - the ancestors are at that back and then this is me. Right now I'm taking all what is a crap shit, blocking every hurt, every wind, not to pass through to my descendents. So it's a heavy load that I'm aware of. It's a heavy thing, it's like getting your children to balance in this new life, to understand the cultures, not to just go along with one culture, one mindset and everything. I'm getting anything that has ever been done in the past in the name of hate, in the name of racism, not to cross the other line. So this is what I know and this is what I'm choosing. When one's life is been robbed, it's so hard in everything. It's hard to know how do I support my children, what should I get them to really study? It connects with everything. It's hard for me to understand the art, the maths, the English, to support them on that. And at the same time how do I get them to balance the culture or balance the way I was raised as a child? You know your mom influences you the way she was also influenced by her parents. Part of that, with your mother, is education, it's part of that influence. With me that is lacking. It's been so hard to be supportive to my children in those terms. I do what I can, but I know there's so much huge thing that I could be better on it, I could be influencing them. I know the importance of education, but I don't know if I know the depths of that. And the stress that comes with writing huge exams, I never had that influence. I didn't have that influence of saying, "You need to make time to study, do this, do this." I just find my way to say, "Now I'm getting ready, when I finish washing the dishes, I have to force myself to study." And it's hard to do it with my children, though I know I'm doing my way.

They're so aware. My children admires me, but they're so aware that I don't have that. I'm sure it's very hard for them. I'm so so sure it's very hard for them. I just hope they will be able to get their children to understand what they didn't have in their lives, to fill the gap. I think their lives are going to be so exciting. I'm looking forward to look at that.

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I'm coming from the bottom of South Africa. I can't say I'm the only one, there are many people, but I come from the farms that are not like the farm in Stellenbosch, not the farm in Paarl, I'm coming from the farm where it's really a farm.

I was driving the other day somewhere in Constantia and I was like, "Okay, now, the thing of the children going to the USA school. Does it mean I'm binding my children to feel guilty about people that are doing things for them? What is this that I'm doing? What is this going to be impacting in their lives?" I have to trust that it's not the issue.

Right now, I don't have means for my children to be in those schools. It's a miracle to me. Boy and I grew up in poverty, without really families. Now we got children that are in the international school. How do we justify this to people? How do we talk about it?

We saying it's an investment that we put on caring about other people. And a life shows itself. We cared about other people. The money that we worked hard to be able to pay the school fees in the international school or in any other school - we didn't do that, we were stupid to work hard. We worked hard for years for other people, not earning any money. But what does God do? He shows us he's not a sleeping God. Our children can go to where super children goes to because he recognize what a human eye does not recognize. What my granddad used to say, "When you do something to another person, you invest in heaven." I believe that. I did a little bit for MamXhaympi, I did a little bit for each and every woman, couple of hundreds of women that I have met in this world, I did just a little bit. I just decided to share what I got for Lindiwe in my house and that was nothing - I didn't even think of investing it. But I believe it's been recognized in heaven, I really believe that. My life's been changed now because I got people in my life and I don't hide that.

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When I think about the woman that gave me this place to sleep outside for three nights, when she gave me that toast, Ali, I don't think she gave me the toast to be full and crush inside and go to the toilet and be done. She gave me toast for life. Why did she toast the bread? You know when you eat a cold toast, even if it's got butter or what, that toast, you break it, it's in pieces in front of you, small pieces, bigger pieces. Surely she knew that. It was not the first time she toasted bread. What happened that day, when I break it, the fine pieces of toast and some bigger pieces will be on my dress as I was sitting. Which means I did not eat the whole toast. If I ate the toast, the whole of it, which means I pick up all of these small pieces. You have to wetten your fingers with your tongue and pick up those small fine pieces. When I look at it today, what did she learn me really? She learned me life is hard. Life can seem like it's breaking into pieces. I can't put these pieces together. No one can eat out of these pieces. There's no fruit from this thing. I think she was telling me nothing from the outside satisfies you rather than what is in you already. If you believe, you got hope and have faith, you can go anywhere. And I think she was telling me no huge fancy basket full of anything can get you anywhere. What is in you, it's what can get you somewhere. So I learned a lot from that toast and whenever I'm facing things, I will always say, "If I can eat those broken toasts hard, how can I not conquer this?" That woman knew it all and, Ali, her words, "You will do good in life," with two breads, two slices of toast! That says all. That's one of the huge blessings in my life and it was not pretended, it was given to be me fully and it is the way I choose to live my life.

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I am a dreamer. I still have a vision. I still see my vision is not losing speed. It is very slow, though. It's not on a train it's not in a car, it's not on a motorbike or anything that is even a little bit fast. It sometimes takes a steep road, but I don't think it ever takes a faster road. It's cautious not to fall.

Everyone knows the enemy has won in many ways; the enemy has destroyed many lives. It has taken away what I could have been. But I'm struggling to look at that as a positive way. I'm looking at my past as it's an album. My album is full of blood, sweat, tears, dusty, dirty, clean photos, small pictures and bigger pictures that I have collected to be where I am today and I love them all. It's full of any word that I can ever remember and any thing that I ever said. I love that. When I look back and page my album, I love the fact that I walk there, alone. Even if there were people

around me that have helped me to carry the burden or to be strong, there was a final point that no one could have ever done for me. I did it.

Now I have to look at my album of life and breathe in and breathe out, to blow a smooth spirit, to heal the wounds of the past. I don't want to destroy them. I just want them to heal. I don't want to destroy them because without my scars, I won't see my past, I won't see my road. I need that past to strengthen my future. To strengthen my children's future. I need each and every inch of it.