



FLORENCE NJERI – My Story



My name is Florence Njeri and was born to my mother Margaret Njeri out of wedlock in 1994 in Kangema Muranga County. That means I was not a child of joy; my mother had to drop out of school due to her pregnancy. My mother loved me but her parents were bitter with her because she could not continue with her education. Other girls of her age stigmatized her and kept her out of their social circle.

When I was three years old my mother met a man who proposed to her and she thought it was a good idea to solve the mess she was in. As a young growing kid I was happy to have a man I could call daddy. Little did my mother know that she was flying from the hot pan to the fire. Immediately she got married, and relocated to Nakuru town where we settled with her husband. She gave birth to six children to please her husband because he was an only child to his mother.

Scary Times

My step father was an alcoholic and abused drugs like *bhang*, and any time he mixed the two he could come and beat my mother and chase her out of the house. It became a routine and a time came when he could chase my mother and myself saying that I was not his child. This was very traumatizing and I got very confused. When I was in Class 5 things became very bad and my step father stopped providing for the family and would come and demand food from my mother. It was so scary and we could spend sleepless nights in the cold .

One day my step father came as usual and found me taking supper with my siblings and mother. He kicked my mother and chased her out of the house after he was served with food. I was left with my siblings crying and he locked the door. He pulled me into his bedroom and ordered me to remove all my clothes. I was hesitant; he forced me with blows. He opened my legs wide and defiled me mercilessly as I screamed and screamed until I could not scream any more. I fainted. In the morning and found myself on my bed well covered. I moved out of bed and went to look for my mother and found her in the kitchen. She informed me my father had gone out early and that's when she had come back in the house. I informed her what had

happened the previous night and how I had fainted and found myself on my bed. My mother told me to shower and not to tell anybody about what had happened to me. I was bitter with my mother as well as my father. I expected her to protect me but instead she silenced me. This became a weekly routine and my step father made me to become his wife. I was so bitter and helpless and decided never to share it with anybody and not to resist whenever he demanded. All this time I was going into depression .

Relocations and Trauma

In 2008 when I was in Class 8, my mother could not bear it anymore and was actually a moving skeleton. She had been reduced to nothing, so she decided to make a very serious decision of leaving home, which affected all of us as a family. She relocated to Nairobi and started staying with my grandmother. We stayed with our father for some months and later he chased us from his compound. I remember boarding the bus to come to Nairobi to join our mother. We carried no clothes and had no shoes on our feet. When we arrived at Kibera in Nairobi my mother broke into tears when she saw us. We looked very malnourished and were in tatters. We were taken to school in Kibera slum. Life was better here and nobody discussed my stepfather.

In 2011 I completed my primary education and joined Valentine High School for my secondary education. In 2014, I was transferred to a day school in Kibera and did my KCSE in 2015. In 2016 my grandmother passed on. Life became unbearable in 2017 when my mother passed on and we felt we had been left as total orphans. My other siblings were in school and I was staying at home assisting in my grandmothers small hotel.

One day when I had been sent on an errand in the evening when four men attacked and took me to an abandoned house. They gang raped me repeatedly in turns without stopping. I could not scream because they had covered my mouth. By the time they left me I was no longer myself. All that had happened to me when I was a small girl came back to me so powerfully that I was out of my mind. I went home and was taken to the hospital where I was admitted and started being treated. I wanted to see nobody and talked to nobody until I was discharged. When I went home I became very withdrawn and spent my days in bed just crying myself out. I was on medication throughout which made me sleep most of the time.

A New Dawn For Me

My cousin Esther came to visit me one day and shared with me what she has been doing. She told me she is now assisting in training of hair dressing at Baraka Women Center where she had learnt many skills. She informed me she had given my number to the Program Director and she would call me and if I am willing I can join them.



Two days later I received a call from Wanjiru Ngigi and she introduced herself to me telling me what they do at Baraka Women Center. She sounded so warm; when she asked if I wished to join them I said yes. The next day my cousin came for me and we went with her to Baraka Women's Center where I was received by Wanjiru and introduced to the center Manager Teresia. Believe you me, I felt as if my mother has come back to living and I

now got the motherly love I have been missing. Esther you are the beginning of my shining star to start again.

As I am narrating my story now to Wanjiru Ngigi, I am being trained in so many skills which I am perfecting. I am being trained in entrepreneurship / transformational leadership skills, hair dressing and beauty therapy, beading and designing with beads, and computer skills. I am a changed person and I have a smile on my face once more. I feel I am loved and I can share my feelings with people I regard as mothers and sisters. I always wake up every morning with a purpose for the day and my future. I dress with the passion of who I am, ready and strong to face the day. My inner me is so powerful and I love who I am today. I have stopped using drugs from the mental hospital and I come alone to the center without my cousin . Before then I could not walk alone because my self-esteem was so crushed and had no confidence.

Baraka Women Center is a place for women and girls who have lost hope in life and feel they can't move anymore. After getting trained I will look for funds and start my own Salon for hair dressing and beauty. I am already a member of Baraka Women [Table Banking] Group where I save 20 shilling weekly for helping me to start my business. I am proud to be a member of Baraka Women's Center .

Story told by Florence Njeri at Baraka Women Center, Nairobi, Kenya March 2019

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