



Ann Muthoni Wanjiru – My Story



My name is Ann Muthoni Wanjiru, born on 4th April 1999 in Mukurweni in Nyeri County to my loving mother Nancy Wanjiru as her first born. I was born out of wedlock and this changed my mother's life. Though she was happy to get me, the man who fathered me was not supportive at all and refused to recognize me as his daughter. As a result my mother never introduced me to my father or revealed anything to me. She loved me so much, but felt stigmatized by her family and community who were also not supportive and ill-treated her - apart from her mother.

Drastic Change In My Life

My mother got married when I was seven years of age. She never got married out of love but to overcome the self and society stigma she felt. I walked with her into her marriage, but from day one my step father never accepted me as his child. Our relationship deteriorated every day. Hell broke loose when my younger brother was born; my step father stopped buying anything for me and would beat me up for nothing from time to time. He would beat me up if I asked for anything like a doll and would remind me I was no longer a baby but a grown up woman.

As a result of this harassment at home, I started projecting my anger to my schoolmates. I became a bully as a way to release the pressure I got at home. I also became very careless with my property and would lose things on daily basis, which made me to be beaten every day when I went home in the evening. Some teachers hated me because of my harassing the small children in school. Primary school was not so interesting but in 2013, I did my Kenya Certificate of School Education and passed. I thought my father would start loving me but it was far from that. In 2014 I joined St. Augustine Gikondi Secondary school in Form One after my mother struggled to get fees.

My Life In High School

High school life started well and I became a good scholar. I was the best student in English, Kiswahili, History and Agriculture. I was also the best player in netball, a member of music and beauty contesting clubs. I was University material but life changed when I was in Form Two. I started being sent home now and then due to lack of school fees and I learnt that my step father had never paid my fees. My mother used to struggle to raise the fees and my maternal grandmother would chip in. This really affected my health and I felt hatred all over. In second term in Form Two, I got sick and was admitted at Out Span hospital in Nyeri, diagnosed with ulcers. After I was discharged I went home and one evening, my father came when drunk and gave me a thorough beating and started abusing me. My mother never stopped him and he chased both us away. After two weeks we came back

from my maternal grandmother but everything had changed now. My mother started defending her husband as she felt I was ruining her marriage; she also started complaining about me. It was hell on earth. I eventually ran away and went to stay with my maternal grandmother.

All this was surely affecting my performance in school and making me harder and rough. I did my Form Four exams and my grades would not allow me to join University. I got admission at Kenya College of Accounts (KCA) to do accounting but my father refused to pay. My mother had no money to take me to college. Instead she talked with her friend in Nairobi to stay with me as she looked for money to take me to College. My mother's friend promised to enroll me in a beauty college. This was never to be; she made me her house help to work from 4 am to 11pm. I slept for very few hours which made me very miserable.

My Miserable College Life

During the day when my mum's friend was at work and her children in school I would finish my work pretty early and would go to search for a beauty college. Finally after a long search I got a college called Imani Maria Mist Training College. This College is in Eastleigh and my step father was not amused at all. I borrowed a skirt from a friend and used a t-shirt as a blouse with no shoes. Instead I would wear shadows to college. I had no fees at all since my mums friend never paid me anything yet I worked up to late at night and would also wake up pretty early. The woman took advantage of me but the life I had experienced at home had made me to be hard headed and also a don't-care. In college I took several courses like printing, hairdressing, beauty and knitting. I excelled in college and this made the management keep me even without fees. My mother finally got her merry-go-round [money] and came and cleared my fees. The woman was not happy at all and became harder to me. She mistreated me so much until I could not bear it anymore and ran away and started staying with my aunt in an estate far from where the college was. It was during this time I did my exams and passed well. After a month, my aunt got tired of staying with me and started making noise to me and sometimes would close the house and I was forced to stay outside. All this time I was walking from Githurai to Eastleigh because I had no bus fare, but finally I graduated and was forced to leave my auntie's place and started living with two girlfriends.

My Scar Turned To My Shining Star

I was the best student in my class that year and became the favorite to my instructors, hence when I completed my course and was to get a place for internship my teacher introduced me to Teresia, the manager of Baraka Women's Center. After I shared with her my life history, she accepted me as a trainer and started giving me an allowance which helped me so much; my scars had turned to stars. Within a month I rented out my own room and bought a mattress and beddings. My mother brought me a burner for cooking and some utensils. This changed my life and I started feeling comfortable. My self-esteem went high and for once I started feeling loved. I made many friends and also improved so much in my communication skills. Baraka Women's Center made the person I am today and I will always remain grateful. I found a reason to smile again and find life meaningful.

My Candle Went Off

The contract at Baraka Women's Center was for three months and after they were over I started looking for work in salons, which I got, but this could not sustain me and pay my house rent. This was a drastic change in my life and became the dark area. It was during this time when my mother got very sick and was diagnosed with skin cancer. Mother was admitted at Kenyatta Hospital and my step father never came to check on her. I struggled to raise bus fare and buy her fruits all the time to take to her. This visits to the hospital affected my work at the salon and I decided to start making detergent at night and selling to the people to raise more money. All this time my step father never joined us when my mother was in hospital. I got a job applying gel on commission in town.

Then I would walk from town to hospital to check on my mother and back. I never took a matatu because I needed to use that money to buy my mother something always.

On Sunday 2nd March 2019, my mother breathed her last while I was holding her hand and this turned my candle off. On this important day, my step father made an appearance but disappeared when he saw her deteriorating condition. When the doctor pronounced my mother was no more, I fainted but I was lucky my uncle was with me. I hated anybody telling me “Ann, I am sorry”. The whole of that week as we were preparing for my mother’s burial, I moved like a zombie and it was so hard for me. Life became especially hard when the caretaker of my apartment called me and informed me my house had been closed since I had not paid rent for three months. The second week we were to bury my mother and on the day while in the mortuary, when I went to view her body, I fainted. I became unconscious and was taken to the hospital and was admitted. All this time Baraka Women was following on how I was progressing. It was this spirit which made me to become strong and after two weeks I was discharged from the hospital though feeling very weak. Life was bad at home without my mother, with a step father who despised me and the fresh grave of my mother.

A Second Chance In Life To Light My Candle

I stayed upcountry for one week and later traveled to Nairobi. I went straight to the caretaker of my apartment and explained to him what had happened to my mother and myself. He empathized with me and allowed me to get my things and look for another house without clearing the debt of house rent. It was during this time when I was struggling with life that Teresia, the Manager of Baraka Women’s Center called me and informed me I can come back to the Center. I did and got a counseling session from Wanjiru, the Program Director, and started feeling loved and appreciated. Baraka gave me a chance to be in the organization again and this is making me feel whole once more. Through Teresia and Wanjiru God has blessed me with two mothers after He took my mother to be with him. I have regained my self-esteem, my light in life rekindled and have girls I am finding like my sisters. I have found a home I felt I had lost after my mother’s death. I am praying for Baraka Women to grow big and big because it’s a home for the hopeless and homeless. God help Baraka Women’s Center to get funds and be in a position to accommodate many women and their children by giving them the voice they lack

Story told by Ann Muthoni Wanjiru at Baraka Women’s Center, Nairobi, Kenya July 2019

Interview and transcript by Wanjiru Ngigi, Program Director, Baraka Women’s Center, 254-721-417993

Contact: Baraka Women’s Center Manager: Teresia Mwangi 254-721-381008

BarakaWomen2015@gmail.com