

I Did Not Break, I Bloomed

By Janet

I was born in Migori County, in western Kenya, and raised by my single mother. Life at home was not easy, and eventually, my mother made the difficult decision to transfer me to Nairobi, leaving me under the care of a children's home in Kibera—the well-known, vibrant slum in Kenya. I completed my primary education at Ayany Primary School, but my learning experience was far from easy.

Life in Migori had its challenges, but what I faced in Nairobi was a burden no child should ever have to carry. The school director—a man meant to protect and guide us—wanted a romantic relationship with me. I was no longer just a student; I was expected to cook for him while his family was away in the village. When I tried to speak up, I was met with silence. I reported him, but no one moved to help. That silence was louder than any words.

Still, I persevered. I passed my primary exams and earned a scholarship to Olympic High School. It felt like the door to everything I had prayed for had finally opened.

Then I got pregnant.

I was in Form Two, and I was scared. I didn't know what would become of me. My mother was disappointed. As a single mother, her greatest desire was for me to finish school and take a different path to a better life. After several honest conversations, we found our way back to each other. We talked about our circumstances and how to move forward. She encouraged me not to give up on myself or on my child. We decided that abortion was not an option. Slowly, my mother became my biggest supporter once again.

When the scholarship organisation found out I was pregnant, they withdrew their financial support. That was another door closing. But despite the hurdles, I knew I couldn't give up on my education.

I was blessed with a smooth pregnancy and a healthy delivery. My mother took care of my son so I could rejoin school through the CFK Funzo project. This project was first introduced to us by my school as an alternative source of financial and emotional support in my journey to get an education and empower myself.

In 2024, I completed high school—with a D on paper, but an A+ in resilience. I now live with a friend's mother in Kianda, Kibera, while my son stays with my mum in the village. We are three generations bound by love, struggle, and a quiet determination to keep going.

My son is my daily reminder that I am the change I want to see. I didn't break. I bloomed—so I can give him the life he deserves.

My dream is to study fashion and design. I want to stitch dignity into the seams of my life, and others'. I want to mentor girls like me—girls who believe their futures are dim, girls who were told they don't belong, girls who were left behind. I want them to know that their stories matter, that they can rise despite the hardship.

This is why it's important to document and archive our experiences.

Storytelling, for me, is freedom. It's the crack in the wall that lets the light in. It helps me carry less—not because the burden disappears, but because I no longer carry it alone. If my story helps even one girl stand up straighter or hope harder, then it was worth telling.

Our stories connect us, and in that connection, we heal.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

My Story Is Not Over

By Trizaa

My name is Trizaa. I am 17 years old and a proud mother to my son, David. I am also a Form 3 student at Mukuru Transformers Secondary School in Nairobi, where I live with my family in Mukuru kwa Ruben, located in the city's industrial district. Many of my neighbours are casual labourers, small-scale vegetable vendors, or hawkers. However, I draw strength from this community, and the women around me who keep me going no matter the situation.

I come from a family of seven. Both my parents are alive, and even though life has not always been easy, I have learned to hold on to faith—to keep pressing on, even when the path ahead is unclear. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, my father lost his job. My mother, a full-time housewife, did her best to provide, but there were many nights when we went to bed on empty stomachs. The next day sometimes held the same empty promise. Still, we endured.

My education was affected. I missed classes often due to a lack of fees and basic necessities. My grades dropped, and for a while, I feared I might not finish school. Then the CFK Africa Funzo project stepped in. They supported me through school, ensuring I had what I needed to continue my education. Since then, I've never lacked anything essential while in or out of school, and for that, I am grateful.

One evening in October 2023, I faced one of the most painful moments of my life. I had gone out to fetch my younger brother. I had to walk through one of Mukuru kwa Njenga's narrow and deserted alleys, a neighboring informal settlement. As I walked, I became aware of three men following me at close range. I was the only girl on that path, and the area was completely deserted. Instinctively, I began to run, but I tripped over a stone and fell. I was assaulted by the three men.

One of them covered my mouth, another pinned me to the ground, and the other pulled up my skirt. I was raped.

I survived thanks to the quick intervention of the security guard who scared them off. When I told my parents what had happened, my father did not believe me. He flogged me until my mother intervened. The following morning, she took me to the hospital. Unfortunately, by that time, I had already bathed, and evidence had been lost. My mother still stood by me, and through weekly sessions at HOPE Worldwide, I finally opened up. HOPE Worldwide is an organisation that works to improve the quality of life for young people in vulnerable communities. Though the trauma has since left deep emotional scars, I found strength in speaking up and seeking support, especially when it wasn't easy.

Two weeks later, I began feeling unwell. It was a difficult period, physically, emotionally and socially. My belly began to grow, and eventually, I couldn't hide it anymore. I left school because I felt uncomfortable being around my classmates. I withdrew from everything and everyone.

It was during a weekly session at HOPE worldwide that someone noticed something was wrong. When I finally opened up, they helped me report the assault to the police. To this day, the men who attacked me have not been arrested. But I believe that one day, justice will prevail.

Now, I am back in school, and my mum helps me take care of my son. I'm not where I want to be yet, but I'm on my journey of growth.

I hope to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Counselling Psychology after my final secondary exams. I want to support others like me. I want to give my son the life he deserves, one filled with love, dignity, and opportunity.

I share my story not to dwell on the pain, but to shine a light for others walking a similar path. Storytelling helps me heal. It gives me strength. When I speak, I feel seen. I feel heard. My story does not end with what happened to me.

I am still here, and this means I am still writing it.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*