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ABSTRACT: This is a nonfiction memoir detailing my journey as an African immigrant. The focus is two pronged: it describes my deeper religious understanding as I went through a journey of barrenness to childbirth while simultaneously narrating the comparison between Kenyan and contemporary American cultures as I emigrate and settle in the United States to pursue further education.

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Introduction.

It was a Saturday sometime in January 2006. Three months earlier, John and I had moved into Scissortail Landing addition in Edmond, OK. The addition was new and additional houses were under construction. I was in the house with nothing much to do. The house was clean. John had vacuumed the carpet in all four rooms on Friday after work. I had run the dishwasher after dinner before doing laundry the night before. The clean clothes were in two laundry baskets waiting for me to fold. I did not feel like engaging my precious morning hours with such a task. The clothes could wait until evening, I decided. John disliked doing laundry as much as I disliked mowing the lawn, so we had an unspoken agreement on the division of labor. I was to do the laundry and he was to mow the grass. No one violated this agreement, and neither of us slackened in their duty. The rest of the house work, and the yard work were no issues; we helped each other on these as need arose. That morning, I felt bored with nothing much to do.

If I had a child, I could be busy bathing him, playing with him, or just going about his business, I thought. The desire for a child could not leave me no matter how much I tried to brush it away. Trying to have a child had proven to be a daunting experience and my emotions had gone through a roller coaster of faith, courage, fear, doubt, and despair. My faith and courage were at their peak when I got pregnant, but fear, doubt and despair quickly replaced them around the fifth week when I miscarried. I did not know how much longer these experiences were going to take, but deep in my heart I did not want to give up; after all, doesn't the word of God in Genesis 1:28 say, "...Be fruitful and multiply ..."? I wanted this fruitfulness in my marriage too, and I wanted God to bless us with children.

It was cold and snowy and going shopping to the mall was not the ideal option. John was in the study room probably keeping up with the news on the internet as he always did. I needed something exciting to entertain me. I am not so much into movies, so I decided a book would do me a lot of good. I went to the entertainment unit and opened the door which ushered me to the array of books we had collected. I looked through them wondering which one I had not read. My eyes rested on two copies of the same book by Jackie Mize, called *Supernatural Childbirth, Experiencing the Promises of God Concerning Conception and Delivery*. I had been given one copy of the book by Rebecca, a friend and fellow Rock Group member at Church on the Rock. I could tell her copy had been read several times because some pages were loose and it looked old and tired. Rebecca had acted upon my constant prayer request for God's intervention in my life concerning children. We had been praying together at our Rock Group which was led by Pastor Greg and his wife Marsha. For the longest time, my prayer request was for God to bless us with a child. To encourage me, Rebecca had given me a copy of the book to read, and I added it to the pile of books we had collected.

I was given the second copy of the same book by Sarah Naylor. Sarah and David Naylor were the leaders over our huddle, which was comprised of five Rock Groups and they were aware of our prayer request as well. Sarah had bought a brand new copy and gifted it to me, but I had just stored it, unread, just like the one from Rebecca. On that day in January, I decided to pick one and read. I sat on the couch and for a few hours, I was engrossed in the 124 page book in which Jackie tells the story of how she was able to have supernatural childbirth when the doctor had told her that she could never have children.

The results were amazing. It was as if my faith had just been jostled. I went to one of the guest bedrooms and prostrated myself on the carpet and prayed,

“Almighty God, if you can give Jackie children even after the doctors had said she would not be able to have any, I believe you can give me children too.”

As I continued to pray, I felt in my spirit that I would be able to have children and write about the miracle too. I didn't know which one I found harder and more impossible to happen between being a writer and being a mother, but I believed that God would do what He had promised. I reflected back on my life; my childhood, my adult life, my career, and saw how much God had been involved in my life all along. He had healed me. He had fulfilled by desire to go to college, and He had blessed me with a husband among many other things. I realized that when I did not know Jesus as my Lord and savior, God still showed me His great love and mercy, and He had seen me through difficult days in life. His love had led me to repentance. Once I was born again and I understood the scriptures better, He expected me to exercise my faith and use the scriptures and prayers to overcome the hurdles in my life.

After reading Jackie's book, I knew I wanted to write my story and so I decided I was going back to school to do creative writing. I knew I would be able to write my testimony one day, and so I needed to start the preparation in advance. I enrolled for my first semester in the Fall 2006, and as I have said throughout this essay, God never fails. In 2010, He eventually gave me the testimony to write about.

Part One: My Marriage.

The Pool Party: May 2000

John and I met at Living Word Christian Outreach Church (LWCO) in Edmond. The church was small and comprised mostly of international students, but the pastor and most of the leaders were Americans. I knew John through Wanjiku, a friend of mine who knew him from

Kenya. All she had told me about him was that he went to Egerton University and he had come to America to do aviation in Fort Worth, Texas. She also told me that he attended Nairobi Lighthouse Church when in Kenya. That was the same church I attended when I was in Kenya. How come I never met him? I wondered. John had moved to Oklahoma after his training in Fort Worth, because of the strong Christian fellowship he saw in Edmond. From my observation, I could tell that he was either dating or was cultivating a relationship with Wangeshi at the church. Out of all the guys at the LWCO, he was the one I would have wanted to date and marry. Everything in him was attractive. He was well built and tall. A God fearing Christian, he behaved mature and he did not run around with girls like most guys did. I was about to graduate from the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. I was an undergraduate in Business Administration with emphasis in Marketing. I did not interact with him much, but I considered him to be a friend of sorts. I liked him but I did not want to raise my hopes, especially because I thought he was dating Wangeshi. I did not have the slightest idea that one day John would be my husband.

In my own completely flawed human wisdom, I had pre-planned my life without really seeking God diligently about it. I learned a hard lesson from Proverbs 16:9 which says, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." Well, I had planned that after two years of college, I would get married, then after two more years, I would have children. I planned all this although I was not dating anyone. In the meantime, I continued to celebrate one birthday after another. I celebrated the 30th; the 31st, and many suitors crossed my path, but my heart did not settle for any of them. When I became a Christian back in Kenya, I prayed that God would bless me with a Christian husband. I had made a list of the characteristics that I was looking for in a man, and one of them was a man who would lead our children and me in prayer.

The second request was for a man who would tell me, “No.” I used to think I was very strong willed and I needed someone who would challenge me sometimes. That was the wrong request, because God answered it, and for the longest time after John and I got married, he told me “No” on almost every idea I came up with, until I sought God in prayer again to cancel the request., That was when John stopped opposing my ideas. Instead, he would listen to me and analyze my suggestions before coming up with a response, which was not necessarily “No.”

For a while, I thought it was easy to make things go my way. My friends and I would attend parties organized by fellow Kenyans and we expected the single guys to notice our looks and come running. We would sit in one area observing the guys and analyzing them. Kenyan Christian men were few then.

My friends and I attended a pool party in May 2000, which was held at the YMCA in downtown Oklahoma City. The party was organized by a group of Kenyans and they had invited about five guys from Texas. We had been told that the guys from Texas were pilots. They were actually pilots in training, but they left out the word *trainees*. Expectations were high. Girls dressed up in high heels, miniskirts, new outfits, and our hair was meticulously done. Most of us visited the salons in the morning. Those who did not have make-up borrowed some from their friends, and all the faces looked smooth and beautiful. Most of the pilots in training were wearing shades, sleeveless jackets or AOPA (Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association) hats. They looked classy.

Girls tried to find out information about them but nothing much was forthcoming, since they did not interact much with the crowd from Oklahoma except the organizers. There was plenty of food cooked by the organizers. We had mandazis (sweet buns), chapatis (unleavened flat bread), samosas (fried or baked pastry stuffed with ground beef), pilau (spiced rice) and

chicken stew among the dishes. As we ate lunch at the YMCA, the pilots from Texas huddled in one corner and stuck to themselves. I imagined they were feeling important, and so they had to act important. In Kenya, some careers are regarded highly and a pilot's career is one of them. Later that afternoon, people went swimming and it was time for the swimmers to showcase their expertise. I was not good at swimming, so I did not want to embarrass myself. I stayed dry. The party ended, and the pilots went back to Texas and that was that.

The girls were highly disappointed at them, especially those of us who were eying them. Rumors circulated that the pilots were married and that was why they did not want to mingle. We wondered why the hosts would invite married guys when the pool party was not for couples. When my friends and I talked to one of the hosts later, he told us that the rumors were not true. He said that he knew one of the pilots called John because he went to school with him in Kenya.

Dating John: 2001-2002

It did not take me too long to realize that I did not have the ability to make things happen my way. I came to terms with the scripture in Mathew 6:33 that says; "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." When praying one Saturday evening in my apartment, I decided I was not going to search for a husband anymore. Instead, I was going to focus on helping out at the church. I stopped worrying about marriage, and age was not an issue in my heart anymore. I made up my mind that I would talk to the pastor the following day and ask him for duties that I could help with at the church. LWCO was a small church that met in one of the rooms at the Edmond Community Center building. We would go in the morning and help setting up chairs and music instruments, and then we would break them down after church. I could tell that the pastor needed people to oversee various duties and that

would free him to do some other work. On that same evening, a friend of mine named Veronica, who lived in Ohio called and invited me to visit her. She wanted me to meet this good Christian guy called Macharia.

“He’s a good Christian, Naomi, and I know that both of you can make a good couple,” she said.

Macharia had offered to pay for my flight ticket to Ohio, so I decided, why not go there and check things out; you just never know. I planned to go to Ohio at the end of the Fall 2001. In the meantime, I wanted to talk to the pastor the following day (Sunday) in the morning to see areas where he needed additional help in the church. I did not get a chance; instead, before church was over that Sunday, the pastor called out four names and said that he wanted to meet those people when church was over. John and I were among them.

“I want the four of you to form two cell groups. A men’s group and a women’s group, and I want you, John and Naomi, to lead each one. These other two will be assisting you,” he said. We all agreed. John and I exchanged phone numbers in order to share ideas on how to tackle the responsibilities ahead of us. At the time, John worked at a bank during the week and at a nursing home at night on weekends.

When I got back to the apartment later that Sunday, after the evening service, I got a call. I only had a landline but John had a cell phone. I glanced at the caller ID and the number looked familiar to the one John had written down for me a few hours ago. I grabbed the receiver quickly and I went to the bedroom which I shared with my sister, Susan, and closed the door behind me. I put my feet on the bed and I supported my head with a pillow against the headboard. It was a two bedroom apartment, and dad used the other bedroom. My dad had just come to America a few months earlier, but my stepmother was in Kenya. My dad had remarried after my mom

passed away. My only other sibling in America at the time was Joe, who lived in Texas. My other five siblings lived in Kenya.

“Hello,” I said.

“Eeh, sasa,” (“Eeh, hi,”) I heard his strong voice coming through the receiver. My heart skipped a beat.

“Eeh, sasa,” I said, smiling into the phone. Then there was a small awkward silence for a second.

“You got home fast,” he said.

“Oh, yeah, it takes me less than ten minutes to get here from church.”

“I still have a few more minutes to go bwana (man), so I thought I would catch you before you went to bed,” he said laughing.

“Oh, come on, I still have some assignments to finish. I don’t go to bed early,” I said.

“For what subject?”

“Physics.”

“I like physics. If you ever need help, let me know,” John said.

“Oh, really, I need help!” His statement was music to my ears. I was not very good in physics. John graduated with a Bachelor of Science at Egerton University in Kenya before coming to do Aviation in Texas.

“Sawa, (Okay), just let me know when you want me to come and help.”

“Can you come tomorrow?” Susan opened the bedroom door as I was mid-sentence, looking at me with curiosity.

“Yes, I can come tomorrow after work. I will let you go study then. See you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow.”

“Who were you talking to?” Susan asked.

“John Ngoka,” I said.

“Oh, from LWCO?”

“Yes,” I said. Susan and Dad knew John from church as we all went to LWCO.

“Why are you smiling? Tell me, what’s going on?” She asked with a curious look. She sat on her bed which was separated from mine by a night stand. Susan is six years younger than I but at UCO some of our friends thought she was older. She was my height, about five foot and three inches, and while I was skinny, she had hips that allowed her to wear two dress sizes bigger than mine. Other than the size, we looked alike in our facial features and we both had long hair and tan skin.

“Nothing!”

“You can’t be smiling at nothing,” she sounded more curious than ever, so I had to tell her the whole story.

“So Mr. Ngoka will be our guest tomorrow, eh?”

“Yeah! He’ll be here tomorrow.”

“Good for you,” she said with a cheeky smile.

“Why? He’s just a friend!”

“That’s how it starts…”

“Come on Suzy, let’s go fix something to eat.”

“As we talk about John?”

“What about him do you want us to talk about?”

“Is he interested in you?”

“I wish I knew the answer, Suzy. Do you think he would be?” I was curious to hear her opinion.

“Let’s see; if he wasn’t, why would he call you as soon as he gets your number and even offer to come tomorrow?”

“You are right; he could be interested, but let me not raise my hopes so high. By the way, you remember I told you about the other guy in Ohio who wants to meet me?”

“I do,” she laughed. “What will you do if it turns out that John is interested?”

“To tell you the truth, my heart is for John. I don’t know the other guy and I don’t know what I will do about it. We’ll wait and see how things unfold.” We were standing in the kitchen whispering in low tones because we did not want dad to hear us. We found some left overs in the fridge and ate that for dinner. It was a late dinner.

My heart felt so thrilled after talking to John, such that I could hardly focus on my school assignment. I felt like God was unfolding something new in my life. How come when I just let go of my quest for a husband things started unfolding? I had just got the call from Ohio the night before from a friend requesting me to go and meet a guy, and now God had just brought John right into my radar. John and I had exchanged phone numbers in order to discuss about cell groups, but in our phone conversation that night, we did not mention the cell group at all. He sounded interested in knowing me personally, and he had offered to come to our apartment. I sincerely hoped that my gut was right. Although I was not sure whether he would be interested in me at all because I thought he was already dating Wangeshi, I was glad to have him as a friend anyway.

However, since I didn’t want confusing situations, I sought God for direction because I felt that I was dealing with two choices. God sees what I cannot see, so I sought Him for clarity.

A lot of guys from church used to come to our apartment but I was not interested in any of them. I enjoyed their company and that was it. It was different with John; he appeared superior in the way he conducted himself. Most of the time when the group of Kenyan students in Edmond would be invited to graduation parties in the neighboring suburbs of Oklahoma, most of the guys would give rides to the girls, but John would ride by himself. I found him cool and reserved, even attractive. Much later when we had gotten married, I asked him why he did not give people rides, and he told me that the passenger door to his 1983 Honda Accord could not open, so he saved himself the embarrassment of having to request someone to sit in the back. No wonder he never kept the car for long after we started dating.

After our initial talk, John kept his word. He came to our apartment on Monday evening to help me with my assignments, and he became a frequent visitor from then on. Susan benefited from his visits too. Sometimes I could get home and find him helping Susan with an assignment. I looked forward to his visits and it appeared he looked forward to them too, because he made every effort to come daily even if it was just for a few minutes.

I was working for Planning and Zoning Resource Corporate part time during the day, and went to school either early in the morning or in the evenings. I took a second job at McDonald's where I worked on Fridays only, from six to close. We closed at eleven, but by the time we cleaned and left the building, it was past midnight. One day I went back to the apartment after work very tired, but I felt so relieved when I found John's car in the parking lot. I wanted to see him every day, but I did not expect to see him on that day because I came from work very late, and I knew he worked on Friday nights as well. I later learned that he left work early that night because they were overstaffed at the nursing home. It was a pleasant surprise to see him. My dad, who was still living with Susan and I, before he moved to an apartment in Edmond, was

sitting in the living room keeping John company. The moment I arrived, dad went to his bedroom and left us in the living room.

A few things were still hanging in the air, mainly the nature of our relationship and his relationship with Wangeshi. I did not want any grey areas, and so I sought to find out what was in his heart.

“Would you like some hot tea?” I asked.

“I don’t drink tea. Juice will do.”

“You are the only Kenyan I know of that does not drink tea. What happened, an aversion?”

“Not really, but I don’t like hot stuff. I prefer juice or water.”

“Here you go,” I said as I placed a glass of juice on the table. I got a glass for myself too, and then I sat on the next sofa.

“Why are you sitting so far? Come and sit here.” I moved over and sat next to him.

I was trying to figure out how I would bring up Wangeshi’s name into the conversation without making it sound awkward. After telling me about an incident his workmate had with a resident, we started talking about a Kenyan party we had the last week which was attended by Kenyans from other states.

“We keep having all these parties, but those Christian brothers don’t open their eyes to see the girls in Oklahoma,” I said.

He held his eyelids with his hands and opened his eyes wider as he looked at me.

“Mine are open,” he said.

I laughed so hard. “Oh, I thought yours had already seen someone else.”

“Who?” “They have not seen anyone else.”

“Wangeshi?”

“Oh, there is nothing between us. She’s just a friend.”

I had gotten my answer, and I was not going to pursue the issue any further.

“My company is going to have an employee appreciation party to be held at Bricktown Breweries, and we can bring a friend or a spouse. Do you mind coming with me?”

“When is it?”

“Friday night.”

“I’ll check my schedule and let you know.”

After finishing his juice, he wanted to go, so I saw him off to his car. That visit meant so much to me. I knew then that our friendship was not just a casual one, but rather, a relationship that would lead to marriage was developing.

One Saturday when he could not come to see me because he had to go to work an extra shift for someone who had called in, I decided to cook dinner, then I called to ask if I could bring him some food, he gladly accepted my offer. I quickly packed some food and took it to him at the nursing home. He clocked out and we spent a few minutes together in the car chatting as he ate. The following day on Sunday, a Kenyan who worked with him told me,

“John told us that you brought him dinner last night; he was so happy.”

He had told me thank you, but I came to learn later that he expresses his excitement by telling someone else about it.

My trip to Ohio was quickly approaching and I no longer looked forward to it. I wanted to cancel it but it would not be polite to do so. I knew I owed John an explanation before I left, because we had become such good friends that we knew what each one was doing every moment

of every day. We either talked on the phone daily or we met or both. At the church, people had noticed our closeness, including the pastor's wife.

I decided I would seek Patty's, our pastor's wife, council, concerning my trip to Ohio. She was about two years older than me and very outgoing. Besides being my pastor's wife, she was my friend too. She advised me to talk to him if I could not cancel the trip. That evening before church was over, I approached John and asked,

"Can we talk sometime today after church?"

"Sure," he said.

I started rehearsing what I would tell him and I wondered what his reaction would be, but I knew it was necessary to tell him. I made a silent prayer that all would be well. After church, we followed each other to my apartment complex where we parked and he got into my car.

"I wanted to tell you about an upcoming trip to Ohio," It felt awkward telling him this.

"When is it?" he asked.

"In a week's time," I said.

"Okay." That's all he said. I wanted him to ask me more questions like, "Who are you going to visit? And why are you going to visit her?" Because that would give me an avenue to explain the issue, but since he did not ask, I had the burden to find a way to give him the remaining details.

"The friend that I am going to visit wanted me to meet this guy... and," I hesitated, "I am now wondering whether I should take the trip or not." I was so glad that those words had finally come out of my mouth. I sat there waiting for his response and reaction.

"Don't cancel the trip. Just go ahead and go."

His words exuded a confidence that surprised me. Was he not worried that I could like the other person? I wondered. However, that is one of the things I liked about him. He did not appear to be anxious about anything. Even when he did not give rides to girls, I figured he was not out to try and impress every girl, and he was not in a hurry to get into a relationship; rather, he was patiently waiting for the right one.

“Will you take me to the airport?”

“Yes, no problem,” I was glad that he had agreed. I was already wondering how I was going to stay for three days without seeing him, so a trip to the airport with him would give us more time to be together.

“Would you like to go to lunch sometime when you get back?” He asked.

“Absolutely,” I said.

“We can go to a restaurant in downtown if that works for you.”

“That sounds good to me.”

The more I spent time with John, the more I fell in love with him. At the airport, he gave me a hug before he left. His touch felt like an electric current through my body. Throughout the flight, I was just thinking about him.

In Ohio, Veronica and Macharia were waiting for me. Macharia was tall and slender. He appeared hard working, because he worked both days that I was there, and he went to school too. During the day, I stayed at Veronica’s apartment alone until evening when we spent time visiting downtown, going to friends’ parties and to church on Sunday morning. I really enjoyed their hospitality and I felt so bad that I had accepted their offer for a flight ticket and yet, that relationship was not likely to take off. I was in an awkward situation when Veronica finally asked me if I liked her friend. I sincerely wanted to tell her no, but I thought it would be wise to

spend some time in prayer about all that was going on because I did not want to rush into a decision, and so I told her that I would pray and let her know.

When I got back to Oklahoma, John was waiting for me at the airport. He asked me how it went and I told him that I needed sometime to pray for God's direction. He respected my decision. I simply prayed that God would give me His answer. During a conference held and LWCO, a guest speaker gave me a prophecy that talked about how God would use John and me in the ministry in the future, and from that, I knew that that was my answer from God. It was very difficult to tell Veronica that I would not date her friend but I had to. I truly appreciated the way he took my answer. He actually came to my wedding.

Soon, it was time to go on what I call our first date. When asked about our first date, John says it was our meeting at the parking lot the Sunday after church when I told him about my trip to Ohio. As for me, I refer to our first date as the day he took me to lunch at McDonald's on Sheridan in Oklahoma City. The place was busy during the lunch hour. We stood in line for a few minutes before we got to order. I ordered the fish meal while John got a double quarter pounder meal. We sat at one of the corners near the window and ate as we talked. Homeless people loitered outside the restaurant, as cars came in and out through the drive thru. To me, both dates were the same. We just sat there and talked the whole time. In the course of time, I learned that we both came from blended families, and he had two siblings and four step brothers and a step sister. I told him that I had seven siblings, and two half-brothers. I am not sure what else we talked about most of the time, but I remember at the restaurant he told me that he had seen me at the pool party that had been organized by the Kenyan students in Oklahoma a few months before he moved to Oklahoma. Oh my goodness, how did I look on that day? How did I carry myself? Was my miniskirt too short or of a decent length? Was my makeup perfect? Was

my hair impressive? Was I over talking at the corner there with my friends? Did I look overzealous to meet a guy? All these were questions that went through my mind the moment he revealed to me that he was one of the pilots from Texas. I thought my girlfriends and I did a good job sizing up guys from a corner of the table, but I had not seen him and I felt disadvantaged.

“Were you in the group of the student pilots from Fort Worth? I asked him.

“Yes, we had chartered a plane and flew to Oklahoma for the party,” he said.

“Oh, man! You guys had airs. You were not even mingling with the crowd.”

“Ha ha ha,” he laughed. “We only knew Joseph and no one else.”

“Tell me, how it feels to fly a plane. Is it scary?”

“No no no, it’s a lot of fun, especially when you are doing the maneuvers.”

“How do you do the maneuvers?”

“You just turn the yoke to the direction that you want the plane to go; like 180° turn. We should go flying one of these days.”

“Oh, no thanks, I don’t want to experience any maneuvers. Normal flying is nerve-racking enough for me.”

I like to listen to John’s stories about flying but I have never flown with him. My heart skips when a Boeng hits a bump; I don’t know how I would do with a Cessna.

After the two dates, John and I started going to a lot of places together. He could pass by our apartment on Sunday mornings to pick me up to go to church. John and I went to all Kenyan gatherings together, and sometimes he accompanied me to the library where he sat at a computer while I studied.

In April 2002, I had a pleasant surprise for my 32nd birthday. John took me to

Chili's Restaurant for dinner. First, it was a major deviation from our regular dates at fast food restaurants. Secondly, he was dressed up in brown dress pants and blue shirt. I knew the day was special because John only dressed up when going to work at the bank and to church on Sunday mornings. He wore jeans and a shirt or t-shirt on the other days. I allowed my mind to fantasize on the possibility of an engagement. Months earlier, John had taken me to the department stores at the mall and he had casually asked me the type of ring I liked, and I had shown him, but I did not know if he had purchased one already. I wore a long black skirt with a slit on each side, with black high heels and blue knitted shirt. I had taken time to curl my hair, and the curls cascaded neatly down to my shoulders, just the way John like them. As he drove to the restaurant, I could see him stealing a few glances at me in admiration. The restaurant was very busy and we waited for a few minutes before we were seated. I did not ask him why he was dressed up as I did not want him to feel uneasy. As we waited, we talked about my school, about our jobs, and about all other things but nothing to do with a wedding. We finally got seated at a table close to the edge of the room. I liked the location because we were somehow hidden from view of most of the other customers. If John was going to propose, I did not expect him to do anything elaborate, but I still preferred some privacy.

After dinner, he reached into his pocket and retrieved the little box. I smiled. He reached out to my hands across the table, and smiling back, he asked, "Naomi, will you marry me?" I looked at his handsome face and said, "Yes John, I'll marry you." He opened the little box and took the ring out. It was one of those that I had admired at the store. I was so glad that he had gotten a ring I liked.

I wanted to go home and tell Suzy all about it, and to show her my ring. My heart was bubbling with joy. When I finally got to see her, we talked about it almost the whole night. She

wanted me to give her every little detail of the event, and I gladly narrated the event, in detail. When we were sure that we had exhausted all there was to talk about, we went to bed at 3:00 AM.

Customary Marriage Negotiations

John's parents lived in Kenya, and there was no way for them to engage dad in the dowry negotiations. John requested Henry, an elderly man among our Kenyan friends, to represent him. We initiated the negotiations in April 2002, because we wanted to have our wedding in May, two weeks after my graduation, but our plans hit a snag. My dad follows the Kikuyu traditional methods of dowry, so I knew that we had to go his way. John is from the Kamba tribe and even though they ask for dowry when their ladies get married, they are not known to extort others. Not so with my tribe. The Kikuyu's are stereotyped as lovers of money. The saying in Kenya is that when a Kikuyu man is lying in a hospital bed very sick and unable to move, and you drop a coin on the floor, he will raise his head to look for the money. Even though my tribe loves money, they work hard for it. They prefer to engage in business than to be employed, and so most of the businesses in Kenya which are owned by the indigenous people are owned by the Kikuyus. The tribe has spread into all cities, towns and villages of Kenya in search of greener pastures. Kikuyus are originally from the Central Province of Kenya, but you will find them in all the provinces of Kenya; the Rift Valley, Western, Coastal, Eastern, Nairobi, Northeastern, and Nyanza provinces doing businesses like running restaurants, grocery stores, or selling used clothes at the open air market. Those very wealthy have companies that engage in international businesses exporting flowers, coffee or tea among other products, and those with limited income will be selling tomatoes and fresh vegetables at the market.

Before I approached my dad to tell him about my desire to get married, I made an international call to my sister Mary in Kenya and asked her to tell me about the process of marriage negotiations and Kikuyu dowry process. Mary is older than me, so I expected her to know more about it.

“Typically, a Kikuyu girl will tell her parents that she wants to get married and she will introduce the man to her parents. The man will do likewise, but he will ask his parents to seek permission from the girl’s parent for him to wed their daughter,” she said.

“Oh, so in my case, do I take John and introduce him to dad?” I asked.

“Probably not, because customarily, a girl is supposed to tell her mother, and mom is not there, but you can ask one of our aunts or an uncle to inform dad on your behalf.”

“Okay, that is a good idea. Then what happens next?”

“The groom’s parents will initiate the negotiations for paying the bride price. They will send a representative to the bride’s parents to request a meeting. When given a date, the first meeting will take place and the groom’s parents will find out what is expected of them for the bride price. They will be accompanied by some friends and relatives. The number of the visitors is not set; it varies from family to family.”

“Okay, I wonder who John will send to represent his parents,” I said.

“Just find two or three elderly men to represent him. Surely, dad will understand that John’s parents are not there in America,” she said.

“I’m sure we can find a friend or two who are dad’s age. I am already thinking of a man we can approach. Thanks for that idea.”

“During the visit, they will give some money to the bride’s parents as a sign of goodwill. The amount depends on the family’s financial capability. The groom’s parents will ask what the

bride price is. Then the next meeting will be held to negotiate the bride price, and that is when the groom's parents will try to bring a larger crowd. Some families are known to bring as many as two hundred people. When the delegation is that large, the groom's parents will send money to the host to support with catering."

"We might have two hundred people to attend our wedding but not to send to dad for dowry negotiations," I said.

"Oh, dad would not expect that many people to come for dowry negotiations at all. Don't worry about numbers. Just find one or two people to send. The bride's parents will also invite friends and relatives from her side to attend the occasion. The parents will choose one or two elderly men and women who understand the tradition well to officiate. A meeting with a large crowd will be held outside where a tent will be set up and food will be served there. When everyone has eaten, a few people, maybe ten from each side, will go into a separate area, probably into the living room of the main house, to deliberate on the price."

"Wow, I remember going to dowry negotiations some years back when two of our brothers, I think it was Joe and Franco, were getting married," I said.

"What happened there?" she asked.

"On both occasions, we were told that a certain amount of money was needed and we came together and contributed. Then we were asked for more money and we had to contribute again." I said.

"Yes, that is what happens. The bigger the group the faster the groom's parents get the money they need to pay the dowry. The negotiations can sometimes be smooth or it can turn ugly when the delegation from the groom's side feel like they are being extorted."

"Okay."

“The representative from the bride’s side will call out the items they want as dowry. Those items vary but in most cases, they will ask for a number of goats, a number of sheep, traditional beer for the old men, and lesos (traditional piece of cloth that women tie around the waist when doing house chores) for the women, clothes for the bride’s parents to wear during the wedding, a water container for the bride’s mother because the girl who used to fetch water for her is leaving. Compensation for the bride’s sister because her roommate is being taken away... The list can go on and on and it can end up being very costly.”

“Oh my goodness! I hope that dad’s list won’t be that long. I will tell Suzy not to ask for any compensation since her roommate is leaving.” I joked.

“If I was in her shoes, I would ask for some cash,” she joked.

“I am glad you are not in her shoes then,” I said.

“In the olden days, those items would be given, but in today’s age, money is given equivalent to the items. Occasionally, the representatives from the groom’s family will step out of the house and hold some discussions with the group outside to seek more money from them. Just like what you experienced during our brothers’ negotiations. The advantage of bringing a large group of people is that they will chip in financially. When the parties agree, money will be given to the bride’s side. The money allocated for the beer will be given to the men and so on. In most cases, not the entire dowry is paid on the same day. The bride’s parents keep a record of the balance which the groom would be expected to pay over time. The payment of the dowry can take years. This allows the groom to establish himself and raise his family without pressure of needing to pay it up. During the years ahead, the groom will visit his father-in-law and make payments until it is paid up. When it has been paid up, the bride’s parents will hold a party in his honor to declare that he has finished paying the dowry. Once the negotiations are over, the

delegation from the groom's side will go outside the front gate to get the groceries and other gifts that they brought from the vehicles, and the representatives from the bride's side will close the gate from inside and block their reentry."

"And that is when they start singing, asking their in-laws to open the gate, correct?"

"Correct. The party outside the gate will start singing and dancing asking to be allowed back in, and the party inside will sing and dance and answer them asking why they want to come in. They will say that they are interested in a girl from that home and they will mention her name. The singing and dancing will go on for about thirty minutes and then the gate will be opened. That will be the sign to the groom's parents that the bride's parents have allowed their daughter to marry their son."

"I like the singing and dancing because it is so entertaining."

"Yes, it is very entertaining. The delegation from the groom's side will bring into the compound bales of sugar, wheat and maize flour, and a lot of other dried goods which will be distributed to the people who came to help the bride's side. The whole negotiation process takes a minimum of six hours. If all goes well, there will be no need for another visit, but if not, then there may be need for another visit until both parties are in agreement. Sometimes the parties don't reach an agreement on the bride's price and that calls for another meeting. On the day of the wedding, the representatives from the bride's side can lock the bride inside her bedroom and demand to be paid an amount of money to let the bride out. This can sometimes turn ugly especially when it delays the wedding program. All that the bride can do is to sit there and cry until the parties agree," she said.

"Thanks, Mary. Please be in prayer with John and I that we will not have to go through that process,"

“I’ll be praying for you. Please update me on the progress.”

Wow! After the call, I felt like I had a tall mountain to climb, and John and I had to assist each other to reach the top. I knew we would make it through prayer and determination. Both our incomes were low; we had credit card debts, and we were going to finance our own wedding from our meager savings. Kenyans usually have pre-wedding parties where they raise funds for the wedding couple before the wedding. The pre-wedding party can raise a lot of money but it all depends on how popular the couple is within the small Kenyan community. We could not depend entirely on the pre-wedding party, and so we had to plan ahead and budget for the wedding expenses.

When we were planning for our wedding, I hoped that we would not have to go through the whole nine yards of the bride price negotiations. I also hoped that since dad was a Christian, he would forego the traditions and just bless us in our new union, but the Kikuyu in him demanded otherwise. I talked to uncle Julius in Kenya and requested him to call dad and tell him that I wanted to get married. Dad already knew that I was dating John because when we started dating, my dad had just come to America and he was living with Susan and me at the time, so he knew all the friends who visited us. I learned from a friend that dad had been inquiring from my friends to know whose son John was. He had been told that he was Kivuitu’s step son. I still went ahead and requested my uncle to inform him so as to make our wedding plans formal.

Henry went to talk to dad on behalf of John, to request his permission to marry his daughter. I don’t know what dad told Henry, but when we went to his house to get dad’s response, it was obvious that the discussion with dad had gone awry, he was very angry and he did not want to discuss the issue much. He just told us that my dad wanted me to be done with school first before I got married.

I was already thirty-two and I was going to graduate from UCO in about two months. I did not understand why dad would be trying to delay my marriage. To me, it sounded like he did not want me to get married at all. I knew he always wanted to run business investments with us, his children. When we were growing up, my brothers helped him run his restaurant and the grocery shop from time to time. Now that we were grown, he wanted us to invest in real estate with him. As I came closer to graduation, he had been trying to talk me into partnering with him to construct rental houses on one of his plots in Kenya. The only logical reason I came up with for the delay was that dad wanted us to focus on the business investments instead of the marriage.

As John and I prayed for a financial breakthrough to finance our wedding, we also constantly prayed against that spirit of delay and stagnation that dad exhibited. Whenever we met, we made a point to pray before we parted. I would also wake up early in the morning daily to pray. We also prayed against the spirit of extortion usually exhibited in dowry negotiations, and we believed that God would deal with dad. We trusted that God would make a way for us to talk to dad at the proper time. Dad had already moved out and he lived in an apartment in Edmond.

John and I discussed the answer from Henry and we decided to postpone our wedding until September of the same year. That would give me time to be done with school and plan for the wedding without stress. We did not inform dad of the changes in our plan, and we did not send any more delegates to him either. I did not want him to try and dissuade me or even try to block my marriage. I also wanted to plan my wedding without thinking about the pending traditions of bride price. John's parents could not go to our home for negotiations because my dad was in America, and so we knew that paying the bride price was our burden to carry.

Our plan to postpone the wedding and stay silent worked to our advantage. I graduated in May and my plans with John went on secretly. God must have answered our prayers.

When dad did not hear from us for some time, he must have gotten worried for some reason. He started calling me every day at 6:00 am before he went to work.

“Hello,” I would answer in a sleepy voice.

“Hello, how are you doing?” he would ask.

“Fine,” I would answer and wait to hear the news for which he was calling me that early morning.

“I talked to your brother, Joe and he sent his greetings.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“You have a good day.”

Dad came up with all kinds of excuses for a reason to call me every morning, and when there wasn't a convincing reason, he simply said he wanted to say hi. Susan and I analyzed this new behavior and concluded that he probably thought that I would move in with John and call it a day. After talking to several people in the U.S. and in Kenya, he finally learned from one of my brothers that we had postponed the wedding to September. When I got back to the apartment in the evening, I found three missed calls from him. The only message was,

“Hi Naomi, this is your Daddy,”

Dad did not speak much English because he did not get a formal education when he was young. The little English he knew, he had learned by listening to people and reading newspapers. I called back.

“Hello,” he answered.

“Hi, I am returning your call,” I said.

“Why did you postpone your wedding and you did not tell me?”

“I could have told you eventually. How did you know?” I was curious to find out who told him.

“Joe told me. Tell John to come and see me. He is my son, tell him to come and talk to me.”

So my brother Joe had told him. No big deal. I trusted that God would deal with the situation and make it possible for John and me to get married in September without any hassles. I felt like God had already given us a breakthrough because dad had asked John to go see him, thereby bypassing the middlemen.

“I’ll tell him,” I said and I hung up.

John arranged with a friend called Waithaka to visit my dad on a Saturday. John had a goat slaughtered and he took the meat with him as part of the gift to dad. In addition, he gave dad \$200 in cash. We were hoping that the money would be counted towards the bride price, but that did not happen. Dad told them that it was good they had visited him to know the home. Figuratively, to know the girl’s home. John was not familiar with marriage negotiations, and so he did not ask dad’s approval to proceed with the wedding plans. When John came back and told me that they had not been given a green light to proceed with the wedding, we decided that we would try to avoid those many visits which could be financially draining. John and Waithaka made one more visit and they told dad that they wanted his approval to proceed with the wedding plans. That was when dad told them the bride price. He counted the number of goats, the number of sheep, and many other things that John could not remember, and when the price was converted to U.S. Dollars, it came to \$1,650. John paid about \$650 and he was told to proceed with the wedding with the understanding that the rest would be paid gradually in the future. Dad

says that this is the amount he paid my grandfather when he got married to my mom, and traditionally, he is required to ask for the same amount. Of course his payment was in the form of live animals—cows, goats and whatever else my grandfather asked for. We were okay with it, as long as we were not required to pay it all at once.

The Marriage Bliss

As planned, our wedding was on a Saturday, in September 2002. The church ceremony was at Metro Church (now Life Church) on I-35 in Edmond. The limo came in the morning to pick me up. My bride's maids and I had spent the night at one of the maid's apartment in Oklahoma City. I did not want to spend the night at my apartment because it was full of family, who had come from various states to attend the wedding. John's mom, my family, and friends had arrived before the limo came, and they congregated outside the apartment. My maids and I were ready and waiting. Through the window, we could see people from the other apartments standing outside watching. The moment the limo arrived, the women started singing. My aunts and a few of the women came into the apartment and John's mom stayed outside with the other group. The group outside sung asking for their new bride to be released to them, and the group inside sung back saying that their daughter cannot walk on the ground. The group outside spread lesos from the apartment door all the way to the door of the limo. The limo driver was instructed to honk from time to time as the women danced, then my dad and one of my aunts held me by the hands on each side, and walked me outside. They handed me over to John's mom. John's mom led me to the limo.

One of the greatest days of my life was unfolding, and I could not hold back my joy. I was smiling and talking too much as I always do when I get excited. I was sad that Susan and I

were not going to share an apartment again, but I knew that it was just a matter of time, and she too would get married.

At the church, John was waiting at the front with the pastor standing next to him. I was so excited to see him, and I had a smile on my face. He waited down there, smiling, and watching my every step. The music was playing. The song was *I can only imagine* by Mercy Me. Everything appeared so surreal as I took small steps down the aisle, with my dad and my aunty on either side, but it was a reality—I was getting married. It felt like the whole world had stopped for me. I could see and feel everyone's eyes in the whole church on me. It was my day, and no other day in my life was like it. As I took the small steps, I thanked God that He had answered my prayer.

Pastor David Ash from LWCO officiated our wedding. We had rented a hall at Oklahoma Christian University for the reception and about 200 people showed up. One thing with Kenyan weddings is that all the Kenyans around are invited whether they get an invitation card or not, so we got more guests than the room could accommodate. We had done a pre-wedding party a few months before and raised \$6,600. We catered our food from Gopuram Restaurant, an Indian restaurant in Oklahoma City. My friend, Esther Njoroge, was in charge of food and she made sure that there was enough. There was enough food but chairs were not enough. I saw people standing by the entrance but there was nothing much I could do about it. The activities at the reception after the meal did not allow most people to stay seated anyway. We sang and danced and moved around the room as the musician required us to do. The bridal party enjoyed the dancing too. When it was time for speeches, we sat and listened. My mother-in-law talked first and she presented us with her gifts. She gave us a computer from John's dad and a cow (which was in Kenya) from her. My dad spoke next and for a gift, he gave us a piece of land in Moi's

Bridge which was our home at one time, and where my mom was buried. He had written the transaction on a piece of paper because the title deed was not available. The reception ended late in the afternoon and we went off to our honeymoon.

John's apartment became our new home. He quit working at the nursing home and maintained the job at the bank. I had long quit my second job at McDonalds and had kept the one at Planning and Zoning Resource Corporation. With a lot of time on our hands, we travelled to various states during our vacations. We also joined a small group of young Kenyan couples with whom we took vacations. One time we went to Broken Bow, Oklahoma, where we enjoyed a weekend there in the woods. The cabin and its location reminded me of the hotels I visited while in Kenya. The road to the cabin was sandwiched by trees, and the experience was spectacular. Squirrels crossed our path from time to time. The cabin itself was surrounded by trees. We visited the lake, played miniature golf and enjoyed the outdoor hot tub in the evenings. At night, we enjoyed our meal which each couple took turns cooking, and we played games or just talked about marriage. One of the couples was married a year before us and the other one about five years before and they had a son. John and I did not have much experience in marriage to talk about but we took in the advice offered by our friends.

During our dating days we had discussed the number of kids we wanted and we had settled for two. We would begin trying to have kids after one year. The first year of our marriage was great. We had no reason to worry about the future or any reason to make us think that we would encounter a test in our marriage. We worked hard to clear the credit card debts and started saving for a house. We attended baby showers and acquired more friends from the circles of married couples. The year flew by quickly and soon it was time to start trying to have kids. I stopped the birth control but it took a while for me to conceive. I thought maybe I was not

counting the dates correctly, so we decided to try a different method. We bought a Clearblue Ovulation Kit which I used to determine my ovulation. That did not work either. I thought it did not work due to the anxiety that came along with using the ovulation machine, so I quit using it. My doctor did not see anything wrong with me, and she encouraged us to keep trying. We kept trying and praying for a breakthrough. During that time, I looked back at my blood line to see if there was any history of barrenness that I needed to deal with spiritually, and I did not see any. All my older siblings had their children without much struggle as much as I could tell. Finally, I got pregnant in 2004. The joy that filled our hearts was great.

Part Two: My Roots.

Sicknesses and Premature Death: My Mom

I grew up in a small town called Moi's Bridge, in the Rift Valley province of Kenya. I was the sixth child in a family of eight. My parents relocated from Boiman, my dad's ancestral home, to Moi's Bridge when dad retired from the military in the early 70s, around the time I was born. My parents owned businesses and I would say we were well provided for. The main challenge I faced when growing up was sickness from malaria. Kenya, being on the equator, experiences a tropical climate and malaria is one of the diseases that people suffer from most. However, it was not malaria that changed our family forever but rather tuberculosis.

My mom was an industrious woman running the family restaurant at the small shopping center in Moi's Bridge. She was well built and strong physically. I used to find her very neat, and meticulous, especially where their bedroom and her clothes were concerned. The bed was always neatly spread, and the bed sheets looked so straight as if they were ironed. She liked to wear pleated dresses and her favorite one had pleats from the waist down. It was white with tiny

blue dots. She could teach every new house girl how to iron the dresses so that the pleats came out straight.

Mom had given birth to nine children between 1960 and 1982, but one of them died as an infant. Both my parents worked hard at the businesses. They went to work at 6:00 am and came home at 10:00 pm. The house girl stayed home with the kids. On Sundays we went to the Catholic Church nearby. If we did not go to church, we went to visit my Aunt (my mom's sister) and her family in Eldoret, a town near Moi's Bridge, or my Aunt's family would come and visit us. This trend continued for years and my cousins were our closest friends when we were growing up. We would also go up-country to visit our grandparents.

I feel like I do not have a good record of the good days I spent with mom because they were very short. The record of the good times I spent with her were overshadowed by her sickness in 1984. The experience was traumatic and it stuck in my memory. However, I do remember the days when my younger sisters, Susan and Phyllis and I, together with the house girl, would go to my mom's restaurant on weekends. Phyllis was two years old then and there were six years between me and Susan and six years between Susan and Phyllis. The restaurant was in the same building with dad's grocery shop and we had lodgings at the back. We liked to go to the town center which was only ten minutes' walk from home. The most exciting thing there would be that we would get money from mom's cash box at the restaurant or from dad's shop, with their permission, and run to the vendors lined up with their fruit stands at the stage just a few meters from our businesses, and buy bananas, oranges, and whatever other fruits we wanted. The experience of choosing whatever we could buy rather than waiting for the fruits mom chose for the day of the week was somehow exciting to us kids.

If we did not buy fruits from the vendors at the stage, we got permission to go to the main market which had more varieties. We could reach the main market by going through the back gate where the lodgings ended and we would be there in five minutes, but we preferred to use the long route going through the front of the stores and round behind to the market. The shops, bars, restaurants, and butcheries on our side of the street were lined up from one end to the other. The covered market was three quarters the length of all the stores and located behind the stores. The businesses on the other side of the street were all lined up the same way but they did not have a market behind them; instead, there were residential houses and ours was one of them. We used to cross the street and go past the businesses to get to our house. We also liked to eat sweets (candy) and biscuits (cookies) at the shop. We did not look forward to eating the mandazis, samosas, chapatti, chicken or any other food served at the restaurant because that was the food brought home for breakfast, lunch and dinner most of the time.

During those weekends, mom would teach me how to wash clothes. Susan would take my mom's position at the cash register. Except Phyllis who was still too young, my siblings and I knew how to run the cash registers and to serve customers at the restaurant and at the shop. Mom and I would go to the back of the restaurant where dad had reserved two rooms for our use from the rest of the lodging rooms. We would get the dirty clothes out on the paved backyard to wash. We would fill three or four large basins with water and start washing clothes.

“You start with the white ones first,” She would say.

“Okay, like this one?” I would pick one of our shirts and I would be ready to dump it into the soapy water. We used Omo, which was a blue powdery laundry detergent. I related the smell of Omo to cleanness and freshness.

“No, I have sorted them out here so that we can begin with your dad’s shirts which are not so dirty.”

“Okay.” I would watch her as she picked dad’s white shirts and put them in the large basin full of water. The shirts would disappear into the foam.

“You start by rubbing the collar, and then the armpits, then the edge of the sleeves, and then the rest of the shirt,” she would say while demonstrating.

I would take one of the shirts and do the same, and when I felt like I had rubbed it enough, I would pick another one and repeat the process. Mom would then inspect the ones I washed and rub them some more, before moving them to the next basin with clear water. We would have two or three basins of clear water which every garment passed through before being hung on the clothes line. We occasionally replaced the water to ensure that clothes came out clean. With time, she no longer needed to inspect my clothes because I knew how to rub until they were clean. I enjoyed doing laundry with my mom even though I would get so tired because of bending for a prolonged period of time.

Mom’s vigorous activities started slowing down when she developed a cough that wouldn’t go away. At first, we all thought it was just a regular cough and she used cough medicines from dad’s shop, but when the cough persisted, she started going to Eldoret or Kitale to see a doctor.

I graduated from elementary, and dad took me to Rosterman Secondary School in Kakamega. Dad had opened a restaurant business in Kakamega and he was constructing a residential house there. My brothers, Dan and Franco, who are identical twins, ran the business as they attended school. They were in their final year in high school. Rosterman was a boarding school which I did not like much. It was small and located in a small village. All the students

were from the local villages except for me and a boy who came from town. It had about six buildings on the compound and two of those were girls' dormitories. I was hoping that dad would take me to Bishop Njenga Girls High School where Mary went to school. Her school had so many beautiful buildings; long classroom blocks, a large dining hall and big kitchen, multiple dormitory buildings some with private cubicles inside for seniors in high school; a clinic, an entertainment room with a TV and multiple bathrooms and toilets. Even though the school was also located near the local villages and very far from the main road, it looked more modern and attractive. It had hundreds of students from all towns and cities in Kenya and I felt like it was classier than Rosterman.

My brothers or my dad would come to see me at school and they always left me with pocket money. I saved some of the cash and took it home with me during the school break. I would tell my mom how much I saved and she would be very happy. To encourage me, she would add her own money and take me to Kitale Town which was the closest town to Moi's Bridge and buy a new outfit for me.

"You have done a good thing to save money. I can see you are becoming more mature and responsible," she would say.

"Thank you Mom. I carried enough supplies to school and I did not need to do any extra shopping, so I saved the money," I would tell her.

"Okay, next time, I will buy something else for you."

"I will save some more next time."

One time she bought me a pair of shoes, and the next time she bought me a dress. I looked forward to those occasions because it meant that I had one more new outfit than my sisters because I would still get a new outfit when the rest of the family got some. I felt like I was

becoming an adult because mom said I was getting more mature and responsible and I liked it. During the school break in August 1984, I looked forward to doing something special with mom, but that did not happen. Her health had deteriorated so much such that she could not even work at the restaurant. She had grown thin and frail. It turned out that the cough was actually tuberculosis. She stayed at home the whole time, lying in her bed most of the time. I was very saddened by the turn of events, but I hoped that my mom would get better soon. My sisters, Mary, Susan, and Phyllis and I, were there with mom while my elder brother Joe helped dad at the business during the break. Joe was a student at the Rift Valley Institute of Science and Technology in Eldoret.

Mom's nightstand was full of medicines. She coughed a lot and removed some substance like mucus which she would spit into a basin that we placed next to her bed. My sisters and I took turns emptying the basin into the toilet and filling it with fresh water every few hours. I knew that mom was very sick but death never at any one point crossed my mind. At least she was there with us and we could see her and talk to her as we wished and that comforted me.

We went back to school in September and I received word than mom had been admitted to the hospital. Then, I never used to pray much, but I still said a prayer for her. I just wanted her to get well so that I could spend more time with her. In October, Dan and Franco came to pick me up from school. I could tell something was wrong because they looked very sad and they did not talk much. When we got to town (Kakamega) I found Mr. Njenga, dad's friend from Moi's Bridge, who had come to deliver the message. He simply told me that mom was very sick and dad wanted us kids to go to Moi's Bridge. That is how serious messages were conveyed. Even though I hoped that mom was still alive as Mr. Njenga had implied, I knew there was a likelihood that she wasn't alive, but I did not question Mr. Njenga because that was not

appropriate. We travelled to Moi's Bridge the following day, and before we could get to the house, I could tell there was a funeral because I saw a lot of people congregated at our home. Even with that glaring evidence, I still hoped that I would walk into the compound and meet her coming out of the house, in her white dress with tiny blue dots. I could not hold back my tears when a group of family and friends came to meet us at the gate. I went straight to the living room, which was connected to her bedroom and when I did not see her, I knew she was gone. I started asking myself why she went without telling me goodbye. At night, I dreamed of her coming to meet me, wearing her white pleated dress with tiny blue dots, and I would wake up just before greeting her, and find that it was just a dream. Those dreams bothered me until I shared them with one of my aunts, who was her closest sister. My aunt taught me how to pray before I went to sleep and the dreams ended. Pre-mature death had taken my mom at a tender age of forty five. Mom was laid to rest on the same compound where the house sat.

My Dad

Dad was born in 1939 and he was the first son of my Cucu. He worked in the Kenyan Army before and after he got married. After his resignation, he moved with all of us to Moi's Bridge, from Boiman, and established a grocery shop there. I was the baby at the time. Susan and Phyllis were born in Moi's Bridge. My parents' business grew and they acquired more businesses. His only brother, Uncle Alex, joined him and together they bought a plot and built their own property where they each had a grocery shop, a restaurant, and lodgings at the back. Dad also bought a matatu (public transport vehicle) which transported people between Kitale and Eldoret, the two towns to the north and south of Moi's Bridge.

Because of his military background, he used to be very strict when raising us. When we were young, he spanked us when it was necessary and that kept all eight of us disciplined. Even though I can count the few times he spanked any of us, those few times were enough to send the message. Unlike dad, mom used to pinch us when we were young, when we did not obey, and that hurt more because it was more frequent than dad's spanking.

Dad never appeared to lose or gain weight. He looked the same all the time. I would guess he weighed about 190 pounds. With time, his hair receded at the center and he eventually cut it all. When mom was still alive, we travelled a lot to both my grandmothers' places. We used dad's matatu which was a pickup fitted with a body and two long benches facing each other. We would leave very early in the morning and stop by my Aunt's place in Eldoret and pick them up. We would arrive during the day, spend the next day there and leave on the third day. We loved to visit our grandparents because they always told us stories, and we would be taught how to milk cows. My maternal grandparents grew plums and we would go to the shamba (farm) and eat a lot of them. My paternal grandfather had passed away long before I was born, but my Cucu (grandma) was alive. At her place, we would go to the shamba and pluck carrots and eat them raw.

Life was never the same again after 1984 when my mom died. We only visited my aunt's family in Eldoret because it was close by, or they would come and visit us on weekends. Dad tried to take care of all his children's issues as best as he could. Once I completed the school year in December, dad moved me to Bishop Njenga Girls High School where Mary was. For some time, I thought my dad was everything to me because he always took very good care of us. I adored him almost to the point of worship. He provided for us and we never lacked anything

nor did we feel like we lacked anything. He stayed at my bedside whenever I was sick until I got well. Because of this, I became very close to him, and I expected him to solve all my problems.

In 1985, while at the high school, I got very sick but the matron who was in charge of the dorms would not allow me to go home and she would not inform my dad, either. There were no public phones at the school that students could use, and so we relied on the matron or the headmistress to make the call, but neither of them did. They usually said that girls pretended to be sick so that they could go home. My health condition deteriorated further and I would be transferred from my dormitory in the morning to the sick dorm where I slept the whole day, and then I would be taken back to the dorm in the evening. The sick dorm had several beds where all the sick girls could sleep during the day. It was easier for the nurse to watch them from a central location. The matron, who was also a nurse, was in charge of all the dorms and she would check on me regularly and give me some aspirin to take. I threw up and I had a running stomach. I must have been suffering from malaria. This continued for a week and Mary got very worried. I grew thin and weak. One day during the lunch break, Mary rushed to the dorm to check on me. She found me throwing up. After cleaning up my mess and dumping the contents in the basin into the toilet, she came back and sat on my bed. One of our friends got two plates of food from the dining hall and brought them to us, but I could not eat mine. I had developed an aversion for food and I did not even want to smell it. I could see that my condition was affecting Mary so much because she could not hold back her tears. She could hardly finish her own food and she constantly took breaks from class to come and check on me. On that day, I could tell she had had enough of it.

“I will seek permission to take you home again today and if the matron does not permit you to leave, we will have to sneak out through the fence and go home tomorrow,” she said.

“How shall we go several kilometers on that road trekking when there are no matatus (public transport)? You know I will not be able to walk.” I said.

“I will carry you,” she said.

“Okay.”

Mary went back to class after lunch and I was left there seeking God silently. Mary was only two years older than me, and I knew that she could not carry me because we were about the same height and she was only a pound or two heavier than me. Although I had lost a lot of weight in that one week, I would still be too heavy for her. Besides, I figured it was better for me to stay at the school where I could get as much water as I needed instead of being on the road, surrounded by bushes on both sides with no homes or cars in sight. I was very worried about Mary’s suggestion also because I could not figure out where I would go to the bathroom if I needed to, unless I went into the bushes. I did not want to argue with her since I felt that she was the only one at the school who truly cared for me, so I agreed with her, but I prayed silently in my heart that God would help me find a solution. It was Friday and it was just a matter of hours, and Saturday would be there. After class, Mary came and helped me back to the main dorm.

The dorm was a large hall with banker beds on two rows. Our beds were next to each other. She assisted me at night whenever I wanted to go to the bathroom. The bathrooms were located outside the dorms. She made sure I had a basin with water nearby in case I threw up. Mary did not discuss the issue of sneaking out of school any further, and I did not ask her if she still planned on doing it. I could tell that she was in deep thought that Friday night, and I thought she was fine tuning her plan.

I knew that girls snuck out of school through the fence, but I did not even know where they found loopholes. The fence looked so tight with wire mesh around it and tall trees and thick

plants to enhance security. I knew that Mary did not know where the loopholes were either because she had never attempted to sneak out. She must have been given the idea by a fellow student. If we were to sneak out, I figured we would have to do so very early in the morning before the day's activities started. On Saturday morning, Mary woke up earlier than usual and I prepared for the worst. I was waiting to hear "Wake up we go," and I felt sicker than before. Mary went to the next dormitory where some of our friends were and found Mbithe, a friend from Moi's Bridge. Mbithe was preparing to leave for home that morning. She told Mary that she was actually getting ready to come and see us because she was asked by the headmistress on Friday to go home and bring the balance of her school fees. God had answered my prayer. Mary told her to inform dad that I was very sick and he should come and take me home. Mary came back to the dorm joyful and hopeful.

"I found someone to deliver a message to dad," She said, not bothering to find out if I was awake or not.

"Oh, God thank you," I said as I threw the covers away from my face. "Who was it?"

"Mbithe. She was sent to get the balance of her fees, and she is getting ready to leave."

"I am sure dad will get the message today. I am so happy to hear that."

"I'll get your stuff ready because dad is likely to come for you today,"

"I believe he will. I am hopeful now that I will get medical help. It will also be a relief for you because you will be able to focus on your studies."

"I'll catch-up with my studies and borrow notes from classmates where I missed class. Don't worry about me."

That morning when Mary helped me to get to the sick dorm, I was very hopeful that my situation would end soon. She was hopeful too as she left me and went to study. Early in the

afternoon, Mary came and told me that dad had arrived. I was very happy. She assisted me to the car. When my dad saw us from far, struggling to get to him, he came fast, almost running and helped Mary to hold me all the way to the car. We did not go back to Moi's Bridge; instead, he drove to Kakamega. He must have figured that there we would have easy access to the hospital. I was taken straight to the hospital where I was given medication. Dad always sat by my side and made sure that I took medicine. I slept in one of my brothers' apartment behind the restaurant and during the day, my dad would come and ask me,

“Can you eat some spinach?”

“No, I don't want spinach,” I would tell him.

“What do you want to eat?” He asked.

“Nothing,” I said.

“Just try and eat something before you take your medicine, so that you don't get so weak.”

“I will drink strong tea,” (tea without milk), I said.

He would rush to the restaurant and come back with the strong tea and a piece of bread in hand. I would eat a little and then I would take the medicine. After about two days, I started gaining appetite for foods and in about a week, I was strong enough to stand on my own. I eventually got better and dad took me back to school. I always reflected on that incident whenever I got sick or I was in some problems and I always wished that I was in Kakamega where dad would take care of me. I had attributed my healing to the effort and care that dad gave me when I was sick and from then on, I thought dad was my savior, and nothing could go wrong in his presence. I totally disregarded that he was a human being with his own weaknesses. I also

did not remember that God was the one who actually answered my prayers, and caused things to work my way. Dad was only a vessel used by God to take care of me.

God sought to correct this misconception. He showed me that He was the one to be worshiped and Him alone. Many years had passed and when I worked in Nairobi in the early 1990s, I used to get a call from my dad every single day and I always looked forward to hearing from him. I was always miserable whenever I missed his call. Since we did not have cell phones at the time, he always called me at the office. He called from a public phone because he did not have a land line either. I eventually installed a phone where I lived so that he could call me at home whenever I missed his call at work. That allowed us to talk on weekends as well. I believe God was jealous about this relationship because I did not long to spend time in God's presence as much as I longed to talk to dad. The Bible says in Exodus 34:14 "You must worship no other gods, for the LORD, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you." One day, I had missed a call from dad and when the office secretary told me that my dad had called, I asked her,

"Did he leave any message?"

"He just said to tell you that he called," she said.

"Did he say whether he was going to call again?"

"No, he did not say."

I stayed miserable the rest of the day, and every phone that rang, I thought it was my dad calling and I was highly disappointed when it turned out to be a tour agent wanting to place a booking. That was the time the spirit of God asked me,

"Do you get as sad when you miss an opportunity to pray, and spend time in my presence?"

“No my God, I don’t feel as sad. May you help me to make you my first love,” I prayed.

Some time passed and one day, I was traveling to Kakamega to visit dad and I got very sick on the way. I had to ask the matatu driver to stop the vehicle at several towns for me to use the bathroom. I was throwing up and I had a running stomach. Deep in my heart, I just wanted to get to Kakamega and sleep in one of the apartments behind the restaurant and let dad take care of me. I knew I would be safe there. But God had another plan. When the matatu got to Nakuru, I alighted and I did not know whether I would even make it to a restaurant without throwing up on the way. I needed to go to the bathroom so bad. I had a heavy bag with my clothes, and I did not even have enough strength left to carry it. I realized that my dad was very far away and even if I called him on the phone, he would not help me at that very moment, so I turned to God in prayer and said,

“God, please help me to get to the restaurant and use the bathroom, in Jesus name I pray, amen.”

I put the bag on the shoulder and walked straight to one of the restaurants near the stage. I asked the cashier if I could use the bathroom and the lady gave me the key. I put my bag on a chair and went to the toilet. I did not care if another customer or someone from the busy stage would come and take it, but my main focus was the bathroom. The moment I reached inside, the vomit and diarrhea could not wait for me to get situated. I started throwing up at the sink, then I needed to squat at the toilet to diarrhea, as I continued to throw up on the floor. The toilet was a small stall with a sink on one side. When I was done, I cleaned up the sink and the floor. The squat toilet came in handy because it was easy to clean up my mess. I simply took the cover from the tank and filled it with water from the sink and poured it on the floor until all the vomit was washed into the toilet. I cleaned up my shoes and I was ready to go. Before I left the bathroom, I

felt completely whole again. All the sickness had gone. I knew there and then that God had healed me. I took a minute to thank Him for the healing. I said,

“God, you are truly God who heals me. I pray that you forgive me for limiting you in the past. Help me to give you the first place in my heart.”

I was able to eat a meal at the restaurant before I took another matatu to Kakamega. My relationship with dad continued to stay strong but not to the point of worship. I knew God was my provider and I gave Him all my worship.

Life in Nairobi

Dad had already relocated to Kakamega by the time I graduated from high school. All my older siblings had graduated too and Dan was given the grocery shop in Moi’s Bridge, while dad opened a grocery shop for Franco in Kakamega. Dad also bought a brand new Massey Ferguson tractor for Joe together with tilling equipment and a trailer. Joe went into farming business after college. He would get contracts to till people’s land and some contracts took him to various regions of the country. Dad moved to Kakamega and took over the running of the restaurant business, so Mary, Susan, Phyllis and I automatically relocated to Kakamega as well. After completing high school in 1986, Mary got married and she lived in Kisumu, a town an hour’s drive from Kakamega. Jane, the first born in our family, lived with her family in a town called Burned Forest in the outskirts of Eldoret.

I graduated from high school in 1987, and I desired to further my education, but I did not get an opportunity to join a university in Kenya. At the time, there were only four public universities in the entire country, and students waited for one or two years before the intake. When I talked to dad about my desire, he said, “Don’t worry, I will educate you until you get to

the university.” When we did not find a chance at the local university, my dad offered to take me to secretarial college in Nairobi. I was turning 18 and I did not know what else I could do with my life after my hopes to join university failed, and so I went to Nairobi and took the course at Queens Way Secretarial College.

Life in the city was way different from the laid back life in Moi’s Bridge and Kakamega. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry. Each matatu wanted to overtake the other to get to the stage before all the others. People walked fast to get to the stage on time before the lines got so long. The businesses, number of matatus and buses and their stages, and the number of people and buildings in Nairobi were multiplied many times over those in the other two towns. My dad had arranged with a cousin, Ngene, to host me as I attended college. My cousin’s wife, Jane, dropped me at the school every morning, which was at the heart of the city. I took a bus home in the evenings. Life changed for me in Nairobi. There was TV in the house unlike, my home where we never had one. We watched television every evening and the whole day on weekends. Jane and Ngene had one child at the time, a one-year-old, cute little boy called Ian. I helped the house girl with house chores. My cousin could take his wife, his sister in-law, and me to Carnivore Restaurant on Friday nights about four kilometers from the city center. The place was spectacular. I had never seen anything like it before. Carnivore is famous for night life where people go to dance. Musicians from different parts of Africa come to perform there. Dignitaries visiting Kenya from various parts of the world make a stop at Carnivore for lunch or dinner to taste the famous meat joint. Lamb roasted over charcoal, chicken wings, crocodile meat, pork and ostrich are among the delicacies served at the restaurant.

It was at Carnivore where I experienced the beauty of Africa as if from a foreigner’s view point. The local day-to-day mundane African life was transformed into a unique beauty that I

never knew existed. As we parked the car in front of the restaurant, my eyes caught sight of the Carnivore Duka. The name itself impressed me. Duka is a Swahili word for shop or store. That was when I started appreciating the beauty and uniqueness of Kenya. An apron with zebra stripes was wrapped around a pole outside the shop; T-shirts embroidered with animal pictures stood in hangers next to the apron. The walls of the Duka and the Patio cover at the front of the restaurant were decorated with polished bamboo trees. Green plants covered the flower bed at the entrance, and jacaranda trees dropped beautiful pink petals on the cars parked by the fence. The inside of the restaurant looked classy. The waiters were in white and black zebra striped aprons, the patrons looked important and wealthy. I could see tables in the dining area arranged meticulously one next to the other, with red table cloths, and white napkins on each table. The walls of the restaurant were red and white crisscrossed like an African fabric. The lights were dimmed, giving it a serene feeling.

We did not sit in the dining room. Instead, we sat outside by the bonfire, where we ordered meat. We ate as we watched people dance. My cousin and his wife danced a little and then we went to the swings. There was still a bit of childhood in me, because I enjoyed the swings the most. My life was temporarily transposed into my teenage days as I pushed the swings to the highest level I could go. Nairobi was a new world to me and it was beautiful. On Weekends, Ngene took us to restaurants in the outskirts of Nairobi where we would eat nyama choma (grilled meat), and ugali (like corn bread, but with white flour).

I watched Ian grow from one stage to another. One day he reached the door handle and he opened it. Soon, he was running everywhere and talking, calling me aunty. His sister, Judy, was born when I was still living with them. She was so precious and I longed for the day I would hold her. When Jane and the baby came back from the hospital, they stayed mostly in the

bedroom and on the second or third day, Jane brought the baby to the living room and handed her to me. I sat there on the sofa motionless. I did not want to disturb the sleeping baby, so I held her quietly until I fell asleep myself. I later moved to a hostel where I stayed until I finished college, but I visited Ngene and his family on weekends.

As a Christian nation, people in Kenya have the freedom of worship and they use it to the maximum. There are churches in the main cities, in the towns and in the villages as well. Sunday is basically considered a day to worship the Lord, and almost every family goes to their local church. During the week, pastors from various churches rent rooms at city hall or other meeting places where they hold an hour service in the morning, at lunch time and in the evening. Some people would get to the city early in the morning and attend the service before going to work; others preferred the lunch hour service, or the one in the evening. On Fridays, Keshas (prayer Vigils) were held in various churches in the estates and people travelled to those places from different parts of the city to attend them. They would be packed to capacity with hundreds of people in attendance. The Keshas started at 10:00 PM and ended at 6:00 AM. Most people stayed the whole time because they wanted the spiritual nourishment, and also due to the fact that matatus did not operate in the wee hours of the night. People managed to stay awake because the program of the night was invigorating. There would be preaching from various preachers, who were loud and entertaining; intervals of singing and dancing throughout the night; quiet time for personal prayers, and time for cooperate prayers as well, and two or three breaks with one which people were served with tea and bread. Basically people loved church and they could jump at anything in the name of church. The thugs knew this and they took advantage of it.

I did not know how much Ngene and his family had shielded me from the evils of the city until one day when I was living at the hostel. I had just arrived in Nairobi from visiting my

family in Kakamega, and wanted to go to Kiambu and visit my aunty and uncle, Ngene's parents, before I checked in at the hostel. I had just turned onto Race Course Road from Uyoma Street by St. Peter's Claver's Catholic Church, where I saw a tall slender man approach me. He wore a grey suite and he did not have anything in his hands.

"Excuse me, madam," he said.

"Yes, sir," I said as I looked up at this tall figure standing in front of me. I carried a big bag that had my clothes; school fees, and pocket money all in cash. I let the bag hang behind my back as I walked slowly towards Kaka matatu stage for Kiambu. I was tired after the eight hour journey from Kakamega, and I needed to get to my aunt's house and get some rest.

"Do you know where Nairobi Bus Union is?" he asked.

"I think it is on Accra Road. Try there," I said.

It had been a while since I had heard of Nairobi Bus Union and I did not think it existed any more, but I did not want to spend time with this man, so I gave him a quick answer in order to get going. There was a very busy stage opposite where we were standing. I could see four Kenya Buses dropping people who had been ferried from Eastlands to the city. Country buses too from Kiambu dropped people as each bus driver struggled for room to park. Before the buses left, other buses came and parked in front of them and the passenger movements intensified. I could see women carrying big baskets alighting from the buses. Young men and women, city dwellers as well as people from the country all alighted there, while others took those same buses to other parts of the city. That was one particular area where I did not want to linger very long because it was full of pickpockets who invaded people's pockets as they hurried to get in or out of the buses, and so I took a step to the side to get the man out of my way.

“Madam, I am a pastor from Kajiado, and I have come here to minister with Prophet Mary Akatsa. Have you seen us on the TV holding crusades?”

“No, I haven’t,”

“We are performing great miracles here in town and if you want, I can pray for you.”

Before I answered him, a short elderly man joined us. He looked like he had just alighted from a country bus from Kiambu. He had with him an exceptionally big kiondo (basket), that looked like one which was used to store potatoes, for it had spots of black patches maybe from banana sap or potato skin. He wore an old jacket that looked dirty and worn out. He acted as if he was panting as he addressed the pastor.

“Pastor, I was in a bus across the street when I saw you, and alighted quickly. Pastor, I saw you on TV at a crusade. You are doing great miracles. Pastor can you pray for me?” He wanted all the words out at the same time, and he got my attention for a moment. The pastor acted very cool and confident.

“I am happy that you have seen the miracles we are doing. We are helping a lot of people in the city.”

“Pastor, can you pray for me? I have here some money that I just got from the bank. I have one hundred and fifty thousand shillings (about \$1,800), pastor please...” The man could not stop talking. I don’t know why I kept standing there listening to those two men, but it felt like I had temporarily lost the ability to reason, and so I stood there and waited for the pastor’s response.

“That’s okay, I will pray for both of you, but I don’t want to attract a crowd here because we are not allowed to hold public meetings without a permit. How much money do you have on you madam?”

“I don’t have any money on me,” I said.

“Take this coin and hold it in your hand and walk ten feet back that way, then open your hand. If the coin changes color to dazzling gold, your money will multiply when I pray over it, but if the coin does not change, then your money will not multiply.”

“Yes, pastor, we will do so,” the old man answered on behalf of both of us. They had fully captured my attention for I was curious to see what would happen to the coin. I had watched men and women lose their money to conmen many times in the past, but when I was the victim, I forgot all that I had learned from the others’ experiences. I followed along with their instructions. The pastor placed an old coin in my hand and the old man and I turned around and walked in the direction I had come from.

I noticed that the old man wanted us to walk along Uyoma Street which was sandwiched between two buildings, and there were hardly people there.

“Let’s stop here. I said as I did not want to turn onto Uyoma Street. We stopped and I opened my palm quickly. To my utter amazement, the coin was dazzling like gold. I looked back and saw that the Pastor was following us closely behind. He stopped too, right in front of us. I turned and faced the directions I was headed earlier and both men faced me.

“Pastor! Pastor!” The old man shouted.

“Yes,” the Pastor said.

“The coin has changed. We are lucky today and our money will multiply,” the old man said.

“Very good. You two are very lucky today. We need to find a private place where we can pray for your money without attracting a crowd. Our permit does not allow us to hold public gatherings anywhere except for the designated areas during crusade.”

“Pastor, we can go over there. There is a private place round the corner where we can pray privately,” the old man said.

Along Uyoma Street, there was a small pathway that led to the back of the stores, and I suspected that was where the old man wanted us to go.

“Show us the place brother, and I will pray for your money to increase without interruptions,” the pastor said.

Suddenly, I came back to my senses and fear gripped me when I realized I was in great danger. I needed to get out of there very quickly. I did not know if they would grab my bag and run with it or not. At that moment, I was very vulnerable. The pastor eyed my bag as if to suggest I needed help in carrying it. By the grace of God, a thought came to my mind and I said,

“You will have to excuse me because my uncle was waiting for me over there and I see him coming to get me now.”

“Okay madam, bye.” the imposter pastor appeared startled to hear that, and he moved quickly to the side to give me way. The conmen walked together in the opposite direction. I walked a few steps and looked back, but I did not see any of them. I was so shocked because I could not tell where they disappeared to so fast. I made hurried steps towards the stage, and I hoped I would not have to line up for a matatu. I got to the stage and the line was not so long. After a few minutes, I was in the matatu heading to Kiambu.

My Career

I got my secretarial certificate around 1989 and worked at several places before I landed a job at Safariland Club reservations office. The hotel itself was located in Naivasha, a

neighboring town to Nairobi. I worked under the Reservations Manager and I mainly answered the phone and assisted the reservations manager in taking hotel bookings from various tour agents as well as direct clients. I recorded the bookings on a big ledger book kept on the manager's desk. It was pre-computer era. I also typed the reservation vouchers for walk-in customers. I communicated with the Hotel Manager and the front desk personnel in Naivasha to coordinate the daily bookings. The Reservations Manager kept any checks and cash paid directly at our office and transmitted them to the hotel's Chief Accountant Mr. Karissa, once a week.

I had worked at Safariland Club for hardly a year when the Reservations Manager lost his job for embezzling funds. The Hotel Manager, the Personnel Manager together with the Chief Accountant presented the names of several candidates who were academically better qualified than I was, to the Director. No one presented my name as a possible candidate because I did not have university degree, but to my utter amazement, Mr. Rohit Pattni, the Director who owned the hotel together with his brother, called me to his office and asked me if I could take the position. I gladly accepted it. Later when I asked the Chief Accountant why I was picked, he told me that the Director said that every time he called our office, I was always the one who answered the calls and when he visited, he found me attending to the customers while my boss sat in a friend's office next door chatting. From that he concluded that I had sufficient experience to run the office. I was authorized to hire a secretary to take my position.

I executed my duties gladly, but with time, my need to further my education increased. At times I felt inadequate when I dealt with tour agents and reservations managers from other hotels that were university educated. Most of the managers at Safariland had had college education, too, and I always hung out with them when at the hotel. When I attended the cell group from Nairobi Lighthouse Church, most of the participants in my group had bachelors or masters

degrees as well, and during our discussions, they gave stories of their personal experiences referring to the time they were in college. I tried relentlessly to join Kenya Utalii College but my efforts were fruitless, so I continued to work as I figured out the other options I had.

The hotel was located by Lake Naivasha, the home to hippopotamuses. Tourists from Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, among others, frequented the hotel. At the Nairobi office, life was much more hectic than at the lake side town of Naivasha. In Nairobi, I woke up early every work day to catch an early matatu to work. The hustle and bustle of the evening commute was daunting. The line for matatus on my route would be several meters long. I would walk fast from work, sometimes with a friend going the same direction, crossing many busy streets, full of commuter buses and matatus, to get to the line fast. I clutched tightly to my handbag while my eyes constantly rotated one hundred and eighty degrees to make sure there were no street boys preying on my handbag. One day I was walking with a friend to the stage when two young boys approached us, one was holding feces in a nylon bag ready to smear it on us, and the other approached my friend and pulled a necklace from her neck. We just stood there in utter disbelief and we let them go. Other people walking by just watched and did not do anything. Life in Nairobi now is good and women don't have to be wary of street boys any longer because the government removed them from the streets and placed them in a shelter, but at the time, they caused a lot of problems.

During the weekends, I would go to the hotel to recuperate, and to take in some fresh air outside the polluted capital city of Kenya. I had gotten my younger sister, Susan, a job at the hotel as a receptionist, and so I spent the weekend with her, but sometimes I took a boat ride to the Crescent Island, a wildlife sanctuary where people and animals interacted freely. The tourists would come there in their khaki pants or shorts, safari boots, short sleeved shirts, backpacks on

their backs and cameras in their hands. I felt like the tourists were superior to me. I don't know whether it was because of their white skin or their money, but probably both. I had observed over time that the workers at the hotel treated the foreign tourists with much respect compared to the way they treated local tourists. They justified their actions by arguing that a tip in American currency was of greater value than that in Kenya Shillings. I think I valued foreign guests in terms of what they represented—a unique world out there that I wanted to explore one day.

I would dress in an African outfit, a colorful dress with a matching headband tied loosely in a knot at the top of my head, exposing my hair at the back, which was neatly braided with long African hair pieces. My dress and my hair were quite fascinating to some of the tourists. Those bold enough, like the Americans, would come and touch my braids and admire my dress at a close range.

“Hi,” I would hear someone calling for my attention from a group of tourists.

“Hi,” I would respond.

“I am Julie and this is Craig, my husband,” the lady would say, giving me a big smile extending her hand for a hand shake.

“I'm Naomi. I work at Safariland Club. Welcome to Naivasha,” I would say, while shaking the hands.

“Thank you. You have very beautiful hair. Can I touch it?”

“Sure,” I would say while extending a braid to her. She would hold one and the husband another, to examine the texture.

“It's so cute. How long does it take to do this?”

“About eight hours.”

“That's a long time, but it's worth it.”

“Yes, it is. Thank you.”

“Your dress looks fabulous, too,” Craig would say.

“Thank you, thank you.”

“Do you mind if we take a picture with you?” Craig would ask.

“Not at all.” They would ask me to stand in the middle as someone else from their group took our picture.

“We appreciate it, Naomi. Thank you for your time. See you later.”

“Thank you. See you later.”

Sometimes I felt like I was one of the tourist attractions at the Island, but I would always smile and answer their questions and let them take pictures with me as they wished. I knew that the pictures were important to them to show to their families when they got back to their countries. When I later came to America, I was equally fascinated by things and people in America. I noticed that America was large and so were its cars, the merchandise at its grocery stores like laundry detergent, milk, cheese. Everything was packaged in large quantities. If I wanted to buy two eggs, I could not walk into a store and buy only two eggs. The least I could get were four eggs packaged together. In Kenya, I could buy an egg from a grocery shop or half a loaf. When I was still new in the U.S., I came across some Americans with sizeable bodies too, and I wondered what they ate to get that big. My brother Joe had told us that American food, including poultry, was processed with growth hormones, and those hormones continue to grow in people's bodies and that was why Americans were tall and big. I was beginning to believe Joe's theory when I met some sizeable Americans.

Because of the large influx of tourists to the island, the animals had come to understand that people were only interested in watching and admiring their beauty and not in hunting them.

The animals, therefore, walked majestically as if to display their beauty in front of the tourists taking pictures. The tourists mainly walked in groups of six to ten people, with a tour guide who would be narrating to them the history of the island. The tour guide would take them to a herd of wildebeest lying down lazily enjoying the soft green grass under their bellie, and warming their backs from the emerging rays of the 10 o'clock sunshine, or to the edge of the island where a herd of zebras would be lined up side by side quenching their thirst with the water at the edge of the lake. Tourists interested in birds would hire the services of an ornithologist from the hotel who would introduce them to fish eagles, osprey, lily-trotters and many other birds among the 200 species found at the island. The sounds of singing birds filled the air and refreshed the atmosphere.

Just like the tourists, I would walk around with my Cannon camera taking pictures of the wildlife and occasionally leaning against a tree to watch a giraffe playing with her calf, or to admire the striped zebras walking in a line behind each other, as if in a wedding procession. After a two or three hour visit, I would leave the island with my camera full of pictures of animals, and birds if I was lucky to photograph any. At the hotel, I enjoyed riding horses on the expansive, beautiful land with trees by the lake and birds in the air. The hotel cottages were spread out from the main hotel building all the way down to the lake. Then I would visit the parrots to hear what they had learned to repeat after the tourists. After that, I would enjoy a cozy evening by the fireplace overlooking the lake where hippos emerged to graze lazily undistracted. I would leave on Sunday after enjoying the complimentary hotel amenities and having gained a pound or two, but I would soon lose it and go back to my usual 115 pounds after embarking on my busy city lifestyle.

During my tenure at Safariland Club, I was able to attend various short courses for Front Office Management at Utalii College in Nairobi. I decided to apply for a full hotel management course at the College, but I was not successful. I later learned that people used bribery to get a position at the government funded colleges like Utalii. Well, I was not going to bribe, so I decided to let go of my pursuit, but I did not let go of my desire for further education. I prayed that God would make way for me to get a college degree.

In 1996, a new accountant was hired at the hotel. He was in charge of collecting the money I had received for the hotel bookings, which sometimes included a lot of cash. With time, I discovered that he never deposited all the money he collected from my office to the hotel account. Thankfully, I kept all my records with his signature. The property owner fired him and hired another accountant. The new accountant tried to introduce a new system of record keeping in which he would not sign my record to acknowledge receipt of the money, but I refused the change. He then colluded with the then hotel manager to have me transferred to Naivasha, and be demoted to hotel receptionist. That gave the new accountant unrestrained opportunity to embezzle hotel funds.

I really struggled to come to terms with the transfer, and up to two weeks after the date that I was supposed to report for my new position, I was still in Nairobi trying to figure out what to do to evade it. Jobs in Kenya didn't come easily, so my options were either to quit the job and start job hunting, not knowing how long I would be jobless, or to swallow my pride and go to Naivasha.

Swallowing my pride was the hardest thing that I had to deal with. When I used to travel to Naivasha as a manager, I could use public transport up to Naivasha town, and then the hotel manager would send the driver with the company vehicle to pick me up and take me to the hotel,

which was about 10 miles from Naivasha town. At the hotel, I would eat at the dining room together with the other managers and the hotel guests, then, I would pick the room in which I wanted to sleep. On the day of my departure, the chef would ask me what I wanted him to cook for me to take to Nairobi, and I always requested him to bake me a cake. The hotel farm manager would pack fresh vegetables for me. The transfer and the demotion meant that I had to lose all those trappings. I prayed hard requesting God to make an escape route for me quickly. I wanted Him to provide me with another better job so that I could resign honorably, but He did not. Instead, He gave me a scripture in Galatians 2:20 which says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ...". Then the Spirit of God asked me "Is it you who lives or do I live in you?" With that question, I knew it was my flesh and my pride that had been controlling me. I knew that it was time to humble myself and accept the transfer.

When I arrived in Naivasha town, the driver was not there to meet me, and I did not expect him, because times had changed. I wished I had a car. I reluctantly headed to the stage and took a matatu to the hotel. The unpaved sections of the road were dusty as usual, but I noticed the dust more that time because the matatu's windows were opened by passengers seeking for fresh air in the crowded matatu. The potholes were more pronounced because the matatu driver did not make any effort to evade them. The journey was longer as the matatu stopped at every stage to pick up new passengers while dropping others who had arrived at their destination.

I was dropped just outside the gate. Susan saw me from her apartment and she came to meet me. I was prayed up because I expected a rough road ahead, but my spirit was heavy. I felt like a sheep surrounded by lions ready to maul me. Susan and I went to her apartment, and I could tell that she was really bothered by the situation. She told me that the manager had

assigned me a house at the most humble staff quarters, where the most junior staff lived. The small, round, grass-thatched houses were one roomed. They did not have a kitchen, so people cooked their meals just outside their houses and took the food in when ready. Because the houses did not have a separate bedroom, most houses that I had gone into had a curtain separating the sitting area from the sleeping area. Susan told me to request a house allowance, and then we would both find an apartment in Naivasha town. I took some time and prayed concerning the issue before going to the hotel manager's Office. By the grace of God, when I got to the office, he asked the personnel manager to assign an apartment to me, and I was assigned a one bedroomed apartment next to Susan's.

When I started my new duties in Naivasha, I felt like my whole life had gone down the drain and there was no way to redeem it. I was sad and gloomy as I tried to adjust to the new life. I could no longer visit the Crescent Island unless I paid for it. I went to Nairobi every weekend because I found Naivasha very boring. Young women in some of the churches in Naivasha wore headscarves, which made them look like old women. I felt uneasy going to the churches where women wore long dresses that covered their legs as a sign of religious chastity, while I wore my mini-skirts. I felt like I was viewed as unrighteous because of my dressing, my facial make-up and nail polish, although Susan told me that no one was bothered by my dress and make-up.

Throughout this time, Susan and her friends; Mwadime, Sarah, Joram, tried to make me comfortable, and I really enjoyed their fellowship and encouragement. I started focusing on the good attributes of my new position. We would meet in the evenings and cook dinner at one apartment and eat together. On other occasions, we would go to the villages surrounding the hotel and preach to people there. It was always refreshing to see people accept Jesus as their savior after sharing the scripture with them. My shift at the front desk was either from three to

eleven or from seven to three. With the extra time either in the morning or in the afternoon, I would go down to the lake and spend time praying in the wooded area. Eventually, I got tired of escaping my new reality, and I started to assimilate slowly. With time, I no longer wore makeup; I did not paint my nails and all the short dresses had disappeared in thin air, and I found a church in Naivasha where I attended and I stopped going to Nairobi every weekend, but I had a nagging desire for change. I applied for jobs and went for some interviews, but I knew that that was not what I was craving. Eventually, I admitted to myself that what I really wanted was a college degree.

I prayed and asked God for direction about going out of the country to pursue higher education. Then I contacted relatives and friends in Britain and in America to help me find a school. Since I did not want any confusion, I prayed specifically that God would open only one door. And since He honors our prayers, He opened the door to go to America.

When I yielded to the call of Christ

The chief accountant, Mr. Karissa at Safariland Club, was a born again Christian who did not let a good opportunity pass without letting someone know how good God is. In early 1990s, when I was still in the Nairobi office, I had visited the hotel one weekend when, in the evening, he called me and the hotel receptionist to his office, which was just by the entrance of the hotel. He opened the Bible and read it to us, and then he preached for what seemed like an hour. All I remember was him saying after preaching that “He’s such a good God! He’s such a good God!” He said it with so much emphasis that the word God sounded like Gad. He closed his eyes when he let those words out as if to let them sink deep into his heart. His mouth opened wide as he said

God!, and he sounded like he was speaking in a crusade. His right hand clenched in a fist, the elbow on the desk and the hand moving in motion with the words as if he was going to pound on the desk but barely missing it. Mr. Karissa did not ask whether any of us wanted to accept Jesus as His personal savior because I was ready to say no. Instead, he just prayed for us and when we left his office, I was tired and exhausted from sitting down listening to him preach.

When I went back to Nairobi, Mr. Karissa's words, "He's such a good God! He's such a Good God!" kept coming to my mind. I started wondering why he loved the Lord with such vigor. Mr. Karissa had a degree in accounting from Nairobi University. He had done CPAs up to CPA-K. He had a wife and five children and a good job at Safariland, but nothing else was so obvious as his love for God. Whenever I talked to Mr. Karissa over the phone when conveying reservations information, he always reminded me that the Lord is such a good God. I was about twenty two years old and I thought I was enjoying life quite a bit, so I wanted to love the Lord at a distance, but the Lord pursued me from all directions. My cousin Virginia, with whom I was very good friends, came to visit me in South B Estate. I lived in an SQ (Servants Quarter). Single girls who could not afford to rent a whole house rented SQs. Mine was a bedroom and a living-room-cum-kitchen, just behind the main house, but detached from it. The SQs were secure because they were within the main compound with a gate at the back. They were also affordable. Most house owners preferred to give their house girls a room in the main house and get a tenant for the SQ because that was an extra income. When Virginia arrived, I could tell something had changed in her because she was bubbling with excitement.

"Naomi imagine! a friend of mine invited me to go to church with her last week, and I agreed. She took me to Nairobi Lighthouse Church which meets at Hotel Intercontinental.

Naomi, you can't believe this, but as we stood singing, I found myself crying and I could not stop," she said.

"Then what happened?" I asked.

"At the end of the service, they asked if anyone wanted to accept Jesus as their personal savior, and I went to the front where they prayed for me. Naomi, I want you to come with me to Church and experience what I experienced. Naomi, please promise you will come with me."

"You know I will be travelling to Kakamega with my brother Dan tomorrow, so I'll not be able to join you," I said.

"Yes, I know, but you can join me when you come back from Kakamega."

"I will, I promise."

That evening, our conversation with Virginia was about the church. It had changed from her usual stories about her experiences in college to her experience last Sunday at Nairobi Lighthouse Church. I did not have much to contribute since I had not had such an experience, and so I listened. The following day, my brother Dan and I took a bus headed for Kakamega. We were going to visit dad, Susan and Phyllis. Mary was already married by then. Dad had sold the business in Moi's Bridge and he had gotten Dan a restaurant business in Kakamega. When his business did not do well there, Dan moved to Nairobi to sell used clothes at the Kikomba Market.

I sat near a window and next to Dan on the other side, in the Akamba Bus. When the bus was full, we left Nairobi around nine in the morning. The city was quiet that Sunday morning. I could see newspaper vendors setting their stands next to restaurants and bus stops in anticipation of a busy day after church. The tall and short buildings flew by as the bus sped through the city. The green plains of the uplands started to grace our eyes as the bus got into the highway leading

to the Rift Valley and Western Regions. Near the small towns along the highway, vendors were up early and lined up along the road selling potatoes, peas, bananas, oranges, and many other kinds of vegetable and fruits. They rushed to any bus, matatu or private car that stopped, and took bananas or fruits to them. There was a vendor or two at each window urging passengers to buy their goods.

“Mama, nunulia mtoto mandizi. Shilingi tano kwa mandizi kumi,” (“Madam, buy bananas for the baby. They cost five shillings for ten bananas,”) a vendor would say.

“Oranges, oranges, oranges. Who wants delicious and fresh oranges for the journey?” another vendor would say, walking back and forth the length of the bus and looking inside to see if he would get a customer, while holding yellow spotless bananas up high on his hand. The moment another vehicle would stop there, the vendors who had not found a buyer would leave and rush to the next vehicle and repeat their advertising. Dan and I bought bananas to eat on the way.

As we neared Naivasha, I could see tourist vans in front of our bus pulling into the Rift Valley Escarpment viewpoint to join others that were already there. Tourists stood with binoculars on their eyes looking over the deep valley in front of them. Others were taking pictures and videos of the beautiful landscape and of one another. The tour guides stood with their groups giving them the history of the Great Rift Valley. With my naked eyes, the houses at the bottom looked like toy houses in the middle of maize farms. The property lines separating each property in squares were so distinct you would think they were roads. Maybe they were roads, but I could not tell. Beyond the valley was the dormant Menengai Crater towering at the back. People in the bus were conversing with each other and those who did not have anyone to talk to slept or read a newspaper. They had probably passed this road many times and the

beautiful scenery was not as fascinating to them as it was to the tourists. It only interested me because I worked in the tourism and hospitality industry, and I tried to view the county from a tourist's point of view. Dan and I just talked the whole time. It was the first time he and I travelled together long distance since he moved to Nairobi. I wanted to know how he was doing in his business since it had been a little struggle to make ends meet at first.

“How is your business doing?” I asked.

“The whole of last week I was able to buy a bale of clothes every day,” he said.

“Wow, that's amazing. How come you got so busy?”

“Yes, it's amazing. I remember that I could hardly finish a bale in a week.”

“I know! What happened to cause the sudden increase?”

“I believe that God has changed my life. A few weeks ago, I saw a man preaching at the football field near the flats where I live, and I decided to go there and listen to him. After the preaching, he made an alter call and I went forward and I was prayed for. I accepted Jesus as my Lord and savior.”

“That's some news! Wow! I could see there was something new in you, but I could not tell what it was. What happened after that?”

“I prayed that God would help me succeed in my business, and with time, I became more focused and my work has just been more smooth and easier to do. I joined a nearby church where I attend Sunday services and Wednesday Bible study.”

I looked at my brother and saw that even his countenance had changed. His face looked brighter and happier. Dan had struggled with one business after another and nothing seemed to work. He came to Nairobi, and we put some money together to buy one bale of used clothes for him to start a business. It cost Sh. 2,500 (about \$30). The Lord had not only changed Dan's

countenance, but he had blessed the work of his hands too. No wonder he had not called me the last week to ask me to send him Sh.50, because he had not run out of money like he always did. To me, Dan was a true embodiment of God's ability and blessings. I admired that God that I saw in Dan, and I purposed in my heart to seek after that God, but I was not sure how I would find him, so I decided that once I got back to Nairobi, I would visit Nairobi Lighthouse Church with my cousin, and there, I would receive this life-changing savior in my heart.

That was my plan, but God had His own plan, that unfolded when we arrived in Kakamega. In the meantime, our journey continued. We went past the Lake Elementaita region where gazelles ran, and zebras walked freely in the grassland adjacent to the highway. When we arrived in Nakuru town, our bus stopped at a restaurant where we went in to eat. Dan and I discussed other business opportunities that we could venture into.

“Do you think you would have time to deliver gunny bags to factories in industrial area?” I asked.

“Yes, I can always make time. Is your business with Kaushik picking up?” he asked.

Kaushik was a friend that I had worked with at a flour factory, and we had discovered that we could become middle-men and buy used bags from the grocery stores that bought flour from the factory and resell them to other stores that needed used bags to package their goods for sale. We kept buying gunny bags and manila bags and storing them. We bought some for as cheap as fifty cents and others were given to us for free because the store owners considered that we were helping them get rid of their trash. We could sell them for five to ten shillings a bag.

“Yes, we have orders but neither one of us has time to do deliveries. We would really appreciate it if you are available to help us. We will pay you one Shilling per bag, most customers order two to five thousand bags, and so, you'll be making good money. We will pay

for the transport. All you will need to do is to get a rental truck and go to the storage; load up the bags and deliver them to the customer in Industrial Area. Your pay will be ready the day following the delivery,” I said.

“I can do that,” he said.

“Great! I will tell Kaushik once we get back to Nairobi.”

“How soon do you want me to start?”

“We have several orders in place already, so you can start the same week you get to Nairobi.”

“That’s a plan.”

“How will you handle the other business when we need you to deliver bags?” I asked.

“That’s not a problem. God has truly blessed me in that I open a bale in the morning, and by noon, all the clothes, or at least seventy five percent of them, are gone. Business is usually much slower in the afternoon and most of us will call it a day by noon. We store the remaining clothes to combine with a new bale the following day,” he said.

“Oh, perfect! That will work very well for us. Let’s call it a deal.”

“It’s a deal.”

We arrived in Kakamega late in the afternoon. Dad was at the restaurant busy attending to customers. The restaurant that had about fifty seats was half full. He was so happy to see us and we were very happy to see him too. I used to visit him once a month and it was always exciting to be home with dad and my siblings.

“Habari zenu?” (“How are you?”) He said as we shook hands with him.

“Mzuri,” (“Fine”) Dan and I said in unison.

“Sit down over here and give me a few minutes to hand over and we’ll go home. Your step mother has cooked food at home, but you can go ahead and order something to eat or drink here too.”

Dan and I went to the kitchen and said hi to the workers. Most of those who had been there long enough and knew us were very happy to see us. We told them that we would be back the following day to visit with them some more. We ordered tea, which came steaming hot. Dad called Karanja who acted like the restaurant manager when dad was away, and handed him the keys to the cash box. When we were done with the tea, we got into dad’s Renault and he drove us home. On the way, we updated dad about our jobs and about life in Nairobi in generally. He also updated us about his business and about the family. Susan, Phyllis and Kariuki, my half-brother, and my step mother lived there with him. He also told us that he had invited his pastor to come and greet us. That sounded out of the norm because it had never happened in all the visits I made to Kakamega before, but I did not say anything. At home, everyone was thrilled to see us, and we were thrilled to see them as well. After about an hour, the pastor arrived and dinner was served. The living room was the wing that connected the other two wings of the U-shaped house. It was long and filled with sofa sets. Susan, Kariuki, Phyllis and I sat at one corner of the room. When I was not answering a question from the pastor or from dad, I talked to my siblings who preferred to talk in whispers as they updated me on the latest news about the family.

“Dad and Mama Kariuki (Kariuki’s mother is how we called my step mother) recently received Jesus as their savior when a friend of dad came to visit and urged them to get saved,” Susan said.

“Oh, now I understand why he invited his pastor. He wants us to get saved! I am not sure I am ready for this,” I said.

Dad sat on his usual spot close to the door, and my step mother next to him. The pastor and Dan sat opposite them.

“Eeh, eeh,” Dad cleared his throat as he called for our attention.

“I invited Pastor Gitau to come and greet Dan and Naomi, and to share the word with us. Welcome Pastor, please proceed,” Dad said after the house girl took our plates to the Kitchen.

Dad spoke in Swahili. The pastor stood and introduced himself and his church and he welcomed us there. He proceeded to share a scripture from the Bible, but I don’t remember which one it was. After the mini sermon, he sat down and kept quiet as if waiting for us to say something. Dad was the first to talk.

“Thank you very much, pastor, for taking your time to come and share the word of God with us. I want my children to know that, a few months ago, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior and I invite any of them that don’t know the Lord to be saved too,” Dad said and sat down.

“I am pleased that you came to visit us today, and thank you pastor for joining us tonight too. A friend of Baba Kariuki came to visit us a few months ago and he told us about Christ. Both of us got saved and we have hope for eternal life with Jesus. I would urge anyone who has not made that decision to consider it. May you all be blessed,” Mama Kariuki said and sat down.

“Eeh,” Dan cleared his throat as he stood up to talk.

“I am very pleased to hear your testimony. I also got saved a few weeks ago and I have seen the goodness of serving the Lord. He has transformed my life in those few weeks, and the only question I ask myself is why I did not accept Him earlier. It is truly good to serve the Lord,” he said and sat down. The pastor, dad and Mama Kariuki congratulated him.

I did not have a testimony to share, so I did not want to say anything. I sat there in silence. Everyone else stayed in silence too as if in expectation of something. I felt like all the eyes were on me and all the ears eager to hear my voice. Even though no one said anything to me, and no one was looking at me, there was a battle raging within me with one voice urging me to stand and talk, while the other reminding me that I did not have anything to say. After a period of silence, I stood up and said the only thing that was in my heart.

“I have been wanting to get saved, but there is something that holds me back. I will get saved one day,” I said and sat down. I was glad I was done and I hoped that the meeting would be over immediately. I was starting to get edgy with this discussion about salvation. I expected dad to stand up and wish everyone well and see the pastor off, instead, Pastor Gitau stood up and said,

“The ball is in your court. You can decide to accept Jesus now and we’ll pray for you and nothing will hold you back again.”

I stayed silent again for a moment to let the information sink in, and the war within me continued to rage, but this time in a new direction.

“Tell him you will get saved but you will wait to go back to Nairobi and visit Nairobi Lighthouse Church—the new church that your cousin invited you to,” was one of the voices I heard within me.

“Is it in your ability to take yourself back to Nairobi that you can guarantee you will get there and go to the new church?” The second voice asked.

I internalized this information for a minute, weighing both options. Waiting until I got back to Nairobi sounded like a good idea. I figured it all out how I would get back to the City on Friday and contact Virginia. She would come to spend the weekend with me at my SQ, and on

Sunday we would go to church. I would have the same experience she had and I would get saved. Sounds good, and this is what I will tell the pastor. That I am not ready at this time.

“Eeh,” as I cleared my throat to speak, I felt the need to review the second message.

“Is it in your ability to take yourself to back to Nairobi that you can guarantee ...?” The whole journey from Nairobi to Kakamega flashed through my mind. I reviewed every bit of it and realized that I could not do anything to prevent an accident from happening. I did not even give myself the breath of life in the morning to guarantee me life.

“I will get saved,” I said as I stood up. My dad stood up and started praising God with his hands lifted up. Susan, as she told me later, just watched and took account of the unfolding events. The pastor stood up and told me to repeat a prayer of repentance after him. I remember part of the prayer was,

“Almighty God, I pray that you forgive my sins. I invite Jesus into my life to be my Lord and Savior; in Jesus name I pray. Amen.”

I knew then that I depended on God to take us back to Nairobi. In Nairobi, I joined Nairobi Lighthouse Church which I attended for the time I worked in Nairobi.

Part Three: Coming to America.

University of Central Oklahoma

A friend told me about the University of Central Oklahoma, in Edmond. In 1996, I sent my transcripts and an application for the Bachelor of Business Administration with emphasis in Marketing. After a few weeks, I received a response letter in the mail from the University. The envelope that contained the application forms and instructions about the TOEFL (Test of English

as a Foreign Language) appeared like a dream to me. Could I be handling an envelope sent to me from America really? The pictures on the school catalogue displaying the red brick buildings looked so appealing. In my mind, the pictures embodied the true meaning of an institute of higher learning, while the photos of the students carrying books made me long to reach that level.

I knew people went to America to study, but to me, those were special and of a different breed. I had cousins that had gone to universities in America and the UK, but they all had a special attribute that enabled them to go there. Either they had already attended university in Kenya and they were going to the U.S. for a master's degree or one of their parents or both were educated and it was easy to guide their children in that direction. I did not feel like I had any of these special attributes, however, I still dared to pray and trust God to make a way for me, and when He did, I was truly taken aback.

When the euphoria was over, I got down to business. I re-read the letter together with the forms accompanying it to see what I needed to do next. I needed to do the following: book and sit for TOEFL; fill out the application forms and provide evidence of financial support, and mail the forms back to UCO; obtain a passport, and obtain an American visa. I needed ample time to do this, and it occurred to me that working in Naivasha was the best thing that had happened to me because I could go to Nairobi in the morning and visit the offices I needed to, book the TOEFL test, obtain study material, mail my application for college and go back to Naivasha in time for my three o'clock shift. With my shift, I was also able to spend time studying for the TOEFL in the morning or in the afternoon, depending on the time I got off from work. My transfer was a blessing in disguise. No wonder the Bible says that we ought to give thanks to God in everything. Before I received the college material, I could not see a good reason to thank God for

in my transfer, because I called it a demotion, which it was in my eyes, but to God, it was a pathway to fulfilling my heart's desire for college. If I had continued to work at the reservations office in Nairobi, I could have been relatively comfortable with life there and I probably could not have taken the bold step to look for college outside the country.

When my day for the TOEFL test drew near, I took one month vacation and went to Kakamega. I asked dad to get me a cassette player and he did. I woke up early every day and played the tape that came with the TOEFL study material and answered the questions. I did this over and over again for the whole day, every day for that one month. I read and re-read the study materials until I knew everything in the pamphlet like the back of my hand. I listened carefully to the American accent on the tape to make sure I understood how words were pronounced, and when one month was over, I showed up at the test center early. I had not been in school for ten years since I graduated from high school. The closest I had gotten to being in school was when I attended refresher courses at Utalii College for Front Desk Management. At the test center, most of the prospective students were quiet and reflective. A few people here and there chatted about the test. Some were saying that it was the second or third time they were taking it. For others it was their first time, but if they didn't pass they would have a choice to go to the UK., they said. I sat there and prayed in tongues silently. I wanted to take only one shot at it, and no more. "My God," I prayed. "If it is your will for me to go to America, please let me pass this test," I was very grateful to God when I received my test score after a few weeks. A copy of my score had been mailed to UCO. Njoroge, a friend from Kenya who had been tracking my application at UCO, called and told me that my application was successful and I should expect the admission letter shortly.

I felt like I was dreaming again, but it was reality, I was admitted to college. However, getting the letter of admission proved to be a challenge. I had given UCO an address in Nairobi and when the school sent the admissions letter together with the I-20, it got lost. Then I requested the school to send another letter, but this time, to send it to Kakamega. They did and my dad told me that the letter was there. I urged him to send it to me through registered mail to ensure that I received it, but instead he sent it through regular mail and it got lost again. I was told that the post office personnel opened any mail that they thought was valuable. I don't know if it was possible to use my I-20 for someone else, but anything is possible. When I lost the letter with the I-20 for the second time, I knew that it was time to war for my future, because it was obvious the enemy was blocking my way. I shared with Susan and the other Christians in our fellowship at Safariland, and a brother in Christ called Mwadime prayed that, just like God sent Michael the angel to deliver Daniel's answer, God would send his angels to war on my behalf and deliver my answer as well. The third time the letter was sent to Nairobi and I received it.

I applied for a passport, and I was very grateful to God that I got my passport in two weeks without any hassles. Some people told me that theirs took several weeks when the officials wouldn't release them because they wanted bribes. The process of getting a visa is the one that I thought would take long because at the time, we would go early in the morning and line up outside the embassy, which was located at the city center. That was before the embassy bombing in 1998. The line would curve and continue adjacent to the street. Only enough people to fill the handful of seats at the lobby would be allowed in and the doors would stay closed. Every time a person came out, one more person was allowed in. Men and women, mostly young people, waited patiently for their turn, or until the cut off time at 11:00 AM. They would come

back the following day and start the process again. The system has changed from the time the Kenyan Embassy was bombed. Now one has to call and book an appointment.

I woke up early in the morning and went to the embassy, but I found other people there that had woken up earlier than me. I did not have a copy of the bank statement with me and that was a crucial document when going to the embassy. My cousin Woki went to bring it as I waited in the line. When I was just about five people away from the door, the clock ticked 11:00 and the door was closed. I sat down on the stairs to wait for my cousin as I prayed. I was determined to go in on that day, but I did not know how it was going to happen. I simply prayed that God would open the door for me. I had been praying that if it was God's will for me to go to America, that I would not struggle through the process. I was still working in Naivasha and I stayed with Woki and her family while in Nairobi. When Woki returned in the company of another woman her friend, and they found me sitting outside, and the door closed and everyone else gone, she was highly disappointed in me.

“Why did you not get inside?” she asked.

“Did you get the document?” I asked.

“It's here, but how are you going to get in now?”

“Just give it to me,” my spirit was charged and I prayed in tongues within me. I prayed that the Holy Spirit of God would touch the heart of the security guard at the door to let me in. I also prayed that God would send His angels to open the door for me. I was not settling for any less. I took the document from Woki and pulled open the main door. The ladies followed me and they sat on a bench by the front office as I proceeded with my envelope full of documents to the guard.

“Please let me in,” I begged.

“I let you in? What time is it?” he asked, smiling and giving me the look that said, “You must be kidding”

“It’s 11:30.”

“Where were you at 11:00?”

“I was out there about five people away when the door was closed,” I said as I kept praying in the spirit. My cousin and her friend watched in silence.

“Why didn’t you come to make your request at that time?”

“Because I was waiting for one more document to be brought to me, and I just got it.”

“What is your name?” He looked at the documents I had in my hands and read my middle name. “Wanjiru, time is up and the door is already closed.”

“You have the authority to allow me in, and you can, if you want to,” I said.

“Okay, hold your envelope and go through that door to your right as if you are going to the drop box and find your way in there.”

“Thank you very much, sir. God bless you.” I said as I went inside. God surely makes a way where there seems to be no way. I thought. I found a seat at the back and made myself comfortable, but I kept praying in the spirit. I had crossed the Red Sea, but there was a Jordan to cross ahead. The embassy officials were known to ask people all sorts of questions. It was said that they were very knowledgeable in a lot of areas. I heard of a man who went with an admission letter from a school of theology in America, and the embassy official asked him to recite John 3:16. The guy did not know the famous scripture that says “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” They turned down a lot of visa applicants every day and a visit to the American Embassy is one that was, and still is, dreaded by many. I had gathered all the documents I

thought I would need, ranging from the admission letter, to the I-20, my birth certificate, my high school certificate, all the certificates from Utalii college for my refresher courses, my dad's title deeds as proof of financial support, bank statements and a letter from my employer.

My cousin Paul, Woki's husband, had coached me the night before. He had studied in America, so he told me to say that I have a cousin who studied in America and he runs his own business here in Nairobi. That piece of information became very useful because the embassy official asked me whether I had family in the U.S. I said no, but my cousin studied there and he is now back in Kenya and he runs his own business. The official appeared impressed. As I sat in front of that small window facing the lady, I overheard the official at the next window tell the girl seated next to me that she did not have sufficient proof of financial support, and her application was denied. I did not know how much was sufficient proof, but at that juncture, I could only pray and trust God to see me through.

"I see that you graduated from high school in 1987," the official serving me said.

"Yes," I said. I wondered whether she would deny me the visa on the basis of having been out of school for so long.

"You will need to work hard in your math because your transcript shows you did not do well in math," she said and she wrote something on my passport. She took another paper and wrote on it too. It just occurred to me that she had approved my visa application. I had expected more questions, but that was all she asked me.

"Yes, madam. I will work hard," I said.

"Take this form and pay the visa fees at the National Bank across the street. Come back at 3:00 PM with the deposit slip to pick up your passport."

“Yes, madam. Thank you very much. I will be back at 3:00.” I said as I gathered my documents and put them in the envelope. I wanted to jump up and sing and dance and worship the Lord there and then, but I knew that my visa would probably be revoked immediately if I caused disruption, and so I left quietly and went to the rest room. Once alone in the bathroom stall, I lifted up my hands and praised God saying,

“Almighty God, you are able to move mountains. Thank you for granting me a visa. You are truly able to do more than we can ever think or imagine. I thank you, my father God, I thank you, my savior, I thank you, Almighty God. May all glory and honor be unto you my God, in Jesus name, amen.” I left the bathroom and on my way out, I thanked the guard again and I told him that I would be back at three. He was happy to hear that I had been granted a visa.

Within the one year that I worked in Naivasha before I resigned, I had been promoted to Marketing Manager, and I used to travel either with other managers or with the hotel owner to Nairobi or to Mombasa to market the hotel. Susan and a full van of friends from the hotel came to see me off at the airport. After one year of my departure, Safariland Club was closed and later it was sold. In 1998, Susan came to college at UCO as well.

I was twenty seven years old when I left Kenya in August of 1997. I was the pioneer from my family to come to the U.S. I had a lot of uncertainties raving through my head because I did not know what to expect in this new country. I used to wonder whether people in America ate regular food like rice, maize (before I realized it is called corn in America), and spinach, like we did back in Kenya. I wondered how true my brother’s theory about the growth hormones was and if I would also gain weight rapidly when I ate the food in America. I was very skinny, weighing 115 pounds, so I really did not mind if the growth hormones would help me gain some weight. What I learned later was that the Big Macs and the Whoppers, which I used to eat like

there was no tomorrow, became my “growth hormones.” My ideas of America were also shaped by movies and shows like *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, which I watched growing up and it made me think that everyone in America was rich. I never thought that there were people who worked manual jobs, so the day I saw a white man at UCO working on a flower bed and handling dirt with his hands, I was shocked beyond belief. *Coming to America* was a more realistic movie in its depiction of life in America. I particularly liked the barber who kept on yapping nonstop as he cut his customer’s hair. The barber was a black man and he just acted like the local barbers in Kenya. One other thing that made me see that America was a country just like Kenya was the scene where there were a lot of rats coming from the garbage. I think it is the same scene with the barber. I never thought there would be litter and rats in America, but the movie depicted American as a country just like any other with both clean and dirty places.

I had traveled with a friend called Wanjiru. We arrived in Oklahoma at night, but the bright lights at the airport made it look like daytime. It was my first time to be in such an advanced country. People were courteous, and I heard, “Excuse me,” every time someone crossed my path. In Kenya, I was not used to that kind of courtesy. It was common for someone to inadvertently step on someone else, and not bother to apologize. I asked my friend Wanjiru, “What am I excusing them for?” Most of the time I did not know what the “Excuse me” was for but later I came to understand that it was similar to the word “Pardon me,” or “I beg your pardon,” and when I stood too close to an American, I would expect to hear “Excuse me,” as the person took a step or two away from me to maintain his or her personal space. I also found the smiles flattering. Everyone in America appeared to smile at me whenever we crossed paths. I was not used to that in Kenya. There we only smiled at people we knew, not at strangers. After

leaving the airport, I realized that it was still bright outside even though it was past 8:00 PM. It was summer, I was told.

The weather was unbearably hot, but thank goodness there is air conditioning in America! If God were to allow the extreme weather conditions found in America to be in Kenya for just a day, I would think that millions of people would die because no one would be prepared for it. There are no air conditioning systems or heaters back in Kenya, simply because no one needs them. The standard temperature there is about 75°F. The coldest month is July when the temperatures drop to about 54°F. The hottest month is February with about 86°F. The only place in Kenya with high temperatures is the coast region where temperatures stay in the high 80s throughout the season. And even there, you will not find air conditioning anywhere except at the tourist hotels. It rained a lot that August and the thunderstorms were very scary, but what was the most unnerving was the news that I watched about wildfires, earthquakes and later tornados in different parts of the U.S.

At UCO, girls stood outside the various colleges and puffed away their cigarettes. "This is a sophisticated world for sure," I said to myself. In Kenya very few women smoked and only those sophisticated like the American women could smoke in public. I had only seen one girl at Queensway Secretarial College smoking during the break and she was dating a white man. I had also seen women at the higher end restaurants like The Carnivore smoking. Otherwise smoking was generally for men.

There were a sizable number of students from Kenya at UCO. Njoroge invited Wanjiru and me to his apartment. When we got there, I was surprised to see wall-to-wall carpet. The kitchen had a full size fridge, a stove and a dishwasher. In Kenya an apartment with such

equipment meant the owner is wealthy. I commented to our host and said, “I can see you are doing well here, Njoroge.”

“Here you become a little mdosi (rich man) you know,” he said trying to fake an American accent.

“Do you work?” I asked. I could not hide my shock at how this young man had become wealthy so suddenly. All I knew was that he had come to America for studies, and so I was curious to know how someone could become so rich so quickly. I knew that people in Kenya back then thought that people in America plucked money from trees, and I was beginning to believe that myth.

“Oh yeah! I work part time at the food court. I make \$4.75 an hour. That’s not bad, given that I have been able to buy two cars.” At that, I was speechless. First because \$4.75 an hour is a lot of money in Kenya; since I had been in America for only a few days, I was still mentally converting American dollars into Kenya Shilling to figure out what the money was worth. But my biggest mistake was that I had not experienced the cost of living in America to know the real worth of the amounts given to me. Secondly, not many people owned cars in Kenya back then and for someone to actually own two of them meant that he was doing well financially.

With time, I came to learn that the apartments come furnished with all the kitchen equipment and the carpet, too. When I went to enroll at UCO, I learned that students could work part time at school, and \$4.75 was actually the minimum wage. And what’s more? It was necessary to have a car, but unnecessary to have two cars. Soon, I discovered that the second car actually belonged to Njoroge’s brother. How about the American accent? I learned that when it does not come naturally, don’t try to fake it, because it won’t last long.

I took a full load of 12 hours each semester except in the summer when I took a break. I felt fulfilled to be attending college. I worked diligently to make good grades. Of all the classes I took, I found Physics to be the hardest. It was the last class I took before I graduated in 2002, and with some help from John, I passed the class. My dad was already in America by the time I graduated. Although I had longed for a college degree for many years, the excitement of the graduation was overshadowed by my wedding expectations. However, my dad expressed all the excitement on my behalf. On graduation day, he called early in the morning and asked me why I was still asleep. I reminded him that the ceremony would not start until later that morning, and I was to report at UCO at around 9:00 am that morning. He was anxious to get there, and so Susan and I got ready and we drove to dad's place and picked him up. They later dropped me at UCO as they went to the Hamilton Field House to await the ceremony. Dad hangs graduation pictures for his children in his living room to celebrate the accomplishment.

I went back to school in 2006 for a master's degree in English-Creative Writing. I had a full time job; therefore, I took only two classes per semester. I faced a bit of a challenge when I got pregnant and was nauseous the whole time. I stopped going to school until three years after Josiah was born. By God's grace I hope to graduate in the fall 2014.

Goodbye to my Cucu

I used to visit my Cucu from time to time, and so when my journey to America drew near, I made one last trip to Boiman Village, Nyahururu in the Central Province of Kenya, to see my paternal grandmother, Cucu Njeri. I don't know how old she was but she used to tell us that she was born during the 1914 World War (WW1). What I was not fond of about the journey to

my Cucu was the route to my grandmother's house from the village center, which was a long unpaved road. However, for the love of my Cucu, and my other relatives in the village, I walked the route time and time again despite the hardship.

It was April 1997, and the presidential and civic elections were around the corner. As had always been the case, chaos erupted from various parts of the country triggered by opposing factions. Insecurity was widespread as the media reported clashes between different political factions during political rallies. Supporters of one political candidate physically attacked their rivals, and their rivals would fight back resulting in major bloodshed or death. Despite the upheavals in Kenya, I was determined to see Cucu. The long rainy season had just hit a month earlier. I knew how messy the journey to my Cucu's was going to be from the village, so I had taken a matatu from Nairobi City early in the morning to give myself enough time to tackle the route, and by 10:00 AM, I had arrived in Boiman Village Center. Although it was about 24°C, (75°F) in the city, Boiman was always cold, during the day and at night, no matter what the season. The houses did not make it easier for visitors unaccustomed to the low temperatures either; the small gaps in the wood framed walls and corrugated iron sheet roofs ushered in the cold chilling wind like a whistle being blown at the midnight hour, causing the legs to freeze and the body to shiver. Through experience, I had learned to carry socks, sweaters, a jacket and extra shawls to wrap myself in, especially in bed to help me sleep. I relied on public transport which only went as far as the village center during the day. I did not like to wait till evening to board the one and only vehicle that passed by my Cucu's place en-route to its owner's house, because that would mean that I would have to waste a whole day at the center waiting for the vehicle.

The ground was wet and muddy, and the air was chilly. Hawkers were walking around selling their wares. One of them approached me smiling boldly, "Sasa sister, niaje?" ("Hi sister,

what's up?") I smiled back and said, "Fit sana." ("I'm doing fine.") "Kuna suruari maridadi hapa ya kusherehekea Easter, utanunua moja?" ("There is a beautiful and flowery underwear here good for Easter holiday, can you buy one for yourself?") He said as he lifted one up for me to see. I was very amused and I told him "No thanks." He tried to persuade me to buy other items but I declined. I hurried and got away from the busy stage full of matatus and commuters and I got into one of the small restaurants surrounding the stage. I knew that I had a long journey ahead, so I ordered hot tea and one mandazi. There were several other customers drinking tea, who were mainly the vendors at the open air market who had been waiting for the rain to stop. They had their merchandise, which were clothes in big sacks outside the restaurants. The vegetable and fruit vendors had their merchandise in big crates. I could see other vendors out there setting up their stalls on the tables at the market. The market was covered with a canvas tent, but I could tell that it had seen better days as it let in light through small holes.

Before leaving the village shopping center, I looked around at the ten or so shops that were there and I picked one where I went and did some grocery shopping. There were other relatives that lived in my Cucu's neighborhood, so I requested the shop keeper to pack four sets of everything I bought. It was not hard to know what I needed to buy since it was the same type of shopping I did every time I visited my relatives at the village, and they appeared to like it. Given that my relatives depended on their small scale farming to generate income, sometimes money became tight. There appeared to always be a need for the basic commodities like sugar, wheat flour, and cooking oil. The children always welcomed bread, cookies and candies because they were a rare treat. I requested the shopkeeper to hold the items at the shop until I sent someone from the village to come get them, which is what I usually did, and it was no problem. The shop keeper knew my Cucu since it was a small village and everyone knew everyone.

After the shopping, I put my heavy bag full of clothes on my back and held the strap with both hands in front of my chest as I embarked on the treacherous journey. I estimated that it would take me about three hours to get to my Cucu's. I looked ahead and wondered how on earth, I was going to trek the whole nine plus miles. It had stopped raining about 30 minutes before I arrived, as I had been informed by the shop keeper. The road was muddy and gloomy. There was no one going my direction. I was not worried about the mud getting onto to my sneakers, but falling into the mud. That is when my prayers came in handy. I made a quick prayer remembering the song by Don Moen, "God would make a way for me where there seemed to be no way." He made a way by giving me strength to get to my destination.

People started streaming from the center walking very fast as if the road was dry and smooth. They had been waiting for the rain to stop, and since they were used to this lifestyle, they walked very fast as if they were running late to a wedding. Women carried heavy baskets on their backs and men had small shopping bags in their hands, and some just walked empty handed. I was amazed at how well they balanced on the muddy road while I was struggling to just keep some balance. Most people from the village looked lean and tall. I think they look so lean because their lifestyle was very hard; they walked long distances to go shopping or to access any essential services like clinics, churches, or even civic offices. Farming also took a toll on their bodies because they had to till the land using their hands for lack of money to buy modern farming equipment like tractors. Most of the people said hi and passed, but one elderly man stopped to say hi.

"Wemwega mwiritu?" ("How are you, young lady?") He said.

"Ndimwega," ("I am fine") I said.

"Urorete kwau?" ("Where are you going?")

“Kwa Cucu Njeri was Kariuki.” (“To visit my grandma Njeri Kariuki.”)

The elderly man proceeded to tell me that he had seen my uncle in Nyahururu town and that we might run into each other on the way if he happened to leave the town soon. That gave me something to look forward to. I kept hoping that each next person coming up behind was Uncle Alex, but he never showed up; instead, I found him at his home when my journey ended. I came to learn that he had taken a different route all together. I bid farewell to the elderly man and he continued on his way, as I continued on mine, treading carefully on the muddy ground.

I sang all the songs I could remember, and when I ran out of songs, my mind drifted back to my conversation with the elderly man. I remembered how his jacket looked used. It appeared like one that is for dry clean only, but I could tell that there was no way for the old man to know that, because the area he came from did not even have electricity, so amenities like dry cleaning were far from his reach. In addition, the hustle to reach the dry cleaning facilities, which were miles away and the cost for the services would not be worth the effort. Instead, he had washed it with water and the lining was hanging from the edges and the jacket looking puffy because he washed it with water. I could tell that the jacket had seen very few washes over its existence because it had changed color due to some permanent stains. A few patches had a dark and shiny color contrasting the original grey. That reminded me of my Cucu and how I did her laundry in the past when I visited her. I had to give her clothes several washes before they produced clean water. On this visit I had bought her a new dress and I hoped she would like it.

The journey to Cucu’s house was lonely. I had no companions on the way and no one to help me with the weight I carried, but I kept moving because I wanted to see my Cucu before I left for the states. I could not use shortcuts like most of the villagers did because I did not know the shortcuts well, and I was afraid of the bushes I would encounter on the way. I used the main

road and I continued on the journey slowly, occasionally looking to the farms where cows were grazing and goats were running around on the other side of the fence. Maize was sprouting up all over the farms. The spinach, kale, and cabbages looked so fresh and begged to be harvested. I just wished I could transport those farms to Nairobi and solve the problem of buying “fresh” (sometimes three day old with yellowing leaves) produce at ridiculously high prices.

When I neared my Cucu’s place, I had to exit the main road and go through neighboring farms. The path was winding and narrowing to a small snakelike path. The path was no longer defined because of the overgrown vegetation around it. Branches from tall trees hung across the path. It was really scary. I felt like I was walking through a bush. Tree branches dropped their rain residue on my head as the long leaves constantly brushed my face. I had to periodically wipe my face as I looked around me to make sure snakes did not come out from the thick vegetation. At some point, I heard the loud sound of gushing water from the river going down stream. It got louder and scarier as I got closer to its path. Being alone in that bushy path, anything loud was scary enough to me. In areas where I passed through a neighbor’s farmland, the neighbors were very kind and welcoming. As was their normal practice, they would ask me to go in and drink tea, which is usually kept hot in a kettle by the fire place, but I would decline and stay focused on the journey.

I breathed a sigh of relief when I finally saw my Cucu’s homestead. The three cows that she owned and a few goats were grazing in the cattle pen near the house. I could see her wood framed granary from afar, standing on wooden stocks and her mud framed house standing beside it. I bent and went through her barbed wire fence and continued to go uphill towards her house. When my Cucu and my cousins, who were sitting outside helping Cucu to peel potatoes, saw me, they ran fast to welcome me home. Cucu picked up her walking stick and walked as fast as she

could to meet me. I hugged my cousins and let them relieve me of the heavy bag on my shoulders and the small bag in my hands. I also gave them the candy and cookies that I had bought for them. I was so thrilled to see the joy on their faces as they took off running back home trying to outrun each other to go and share the news of my arrival with Uncle Alex. When my Cucu arrived, I could see tears streaming from her wrinkled eyes. I hugged her and she cried, “Naomi, Naomi mwana wakwa niwandirikana!” (“Naomi Naomi, my child you have remembered me!”)

I tried to put on a brave face and said, “Eeh Cucu nindakuririkana,” (“Yes, Grandma, I have remembered you,”) as I fought back tears. She held my hand and led me to her house.

“Waimana na Nyairobi?” (“Have you come from Nairobi?”) she asked.

“Eeh, ndauma Nairobi, no nindiriritii na baba e Kakamega na matiri na uru.” (“Yes, I have come from Nairobi but I had talked to dad in Kakamega and he is okay,” I said. We continued to talk, and I told her that my siblings were all doing well and they had sent their greetings.

Cucu lived in a mud house with corrugated iron sheets for a roof. The house had been there all my life as far as I could remember. Mud houses were ancient and were an economical way of building, because people could just use dirt for the walls, and cow dung to plaster the walls and to smooth the floors. The house would smell for a few days before the cow dung dried up, but people were used to it. The cow dung was used regularly to patch up the floors that chipped up afterwards. My Cucu’s house had two parts to it. The big house had two bedrooms and an area that could have been the living room but she had turned it into a storage area, where she kept her farm tools. Right in front of the main house was a kitchen that served as the living room and kitchen. There was a roof connecting the kitchen to the main house. The kitchen was

grass thatched. Special grass for roofing was used, which could be found in swampy areas. The grass would be cut and allowed to sit for a few days to dry before being placed on the roof. This was useful for the smoke to escape easily from the fire at the middle of the kitchen. My Cucu took me to her kitchen and she quickly fetched firewood from the stack at the corner of the kitchen.

“Tell me, how was your journey?” she asked.

“Oh, well, the journey was long and lonely. I walked for three hours from the center and I did not meet anyone I knew on the way. But generally, I had a good journey,” I said.

“If we had a phone, you could have called to inform us that you were coming, and we could have sent someone to meet you,” she joked. Back then, telephones were rare and few people had land lines. Cell phones had just been introduced in Kenya but only the very wealthy had them. A cell phone cost over 200,000 Kenya Shillings; slightly over \$2,000 today. Nowadays, there is great competition in the cell phone market and even grandmothers can afford to carry two cell phones with different carriers.

“Yes, that technology will reach this place one day,” I assured her.

“What is new in Nairobi?” she inquired. I had learned that people in up-country did not know what kind of news to expect when they received a visitor from far. He or she could be bringing either good or bad news. So they were usually eager to know the purpose of the visit.

“I came to see you because I will be travelling to America for further studies in August,” I said.

“To America? That is far!” She exclaimed as she put two pieces of firewood into the dwindling fire. She knelt down; adjusted one of the three fire stones; ruffled the fire with a piece

of firewood and put it back into the fire. She blew air into it and flame emerged. This is an art. I thought to myself.

“Yes, it is far, but I hope to come back home soon,” I said.

Uncle Alex walked in and exclaimed, “Eeh wa maitu!” (“Hi my sister!”).

I stood up to greet him, and he gave me one big clap handshake. Our hands made a “pang!” noise when they met in the air. I was so thrilled to see him. He is my dad’s only brother, although they have many half-brothers. My grandfather had married four wives, and my Cucu was the third one. He had attempted to marry two more but I was told that the girls ran away before the marriages were consummated, because they did not want to marry an old man. My Cucu had borne him five children. The other wives had several children each, and after my grandfather passed away, each woman moved with her children and they all settled in different parts of the country.

Age was catching up with my uncle since he had moved back up-country. He looked much younger and more vibrant when he ran his business next to my dad’s in Moi’s Bridge Town, but on that day, he looked older than his early fifties. He looked thinner especially because of his six foot height. He had assimilated into the up-country lifestyle where he wore an old fashioned hat instead of the cowboy hats he used to wear. He had also lost two front teeth and he had not replaced them, making him look older than he really was. But all in all, he had not lost his smile and his affection for me.

“Eeh baba!” (“Hi Dad!”) I responded calling him dad; the appropriate way to address him in the Kikuyu custom.

“I am so glad to see you. How was your journey?” He asked.

I updated him about my journey from Nairobi and about my planned journey to America. He sat on the other three legged stool next to mine, and after catching up with all the news I had, he joked that when I go back home to visit from America, I will be speaking through my nose like the Americans do.

Cucu warmed the tea in the kettle that was by the fireplace, and filled two cups for us. She then took her walking stick and went outside where I heard her instructing one of my cousins to slaughter a chicken. Then she went to the garden behind the kitchen and plucked a cabbage, some carrots and peas. She brought them in and I helped peel the peas, and I cut the carrots into small pieces, as she sliced the cabbage. She cooked all the vegetables together with the potatoes she had peeled earlier. The three of us engaged in a conversation about my going to America. Cucu and Uncle Alex were mostly asking questions of where I would stay, who I knew in America, and generally expressing their feelings of the impending separation. The soot above us threatened to fall on my tea at any time, but with time, I forgot about its existence and enjoyed the hearty meal when it was served. The only thing that kept bothering me was the smoke coming from the fire, which made my eyes tear up, but Cucu was always quick to blow some air into it to keep the flame ablaze, which reduced the smoke.

After dinner, I gave Cucu my gift, which was the dress I had bought in Nairobi. She was grateful and took it to her main house, but upon her return, she brought a letter with her and gave it to me to read. It was written in my tribal Kikuyu language, which was hard for me to read, so I read it slowly in order to understand every word. It was addressed to my dad, Samuel Mwaura Kariuki. In the letter, she complained that she had lived in the same house since the war ended, (I think it was WWII), and despite her request for a new house, dad had not built one for her. I

knew right away that the letter was a curse to my dad. Tears of pain and anger started flowing down my cheeks.

“Why would you write such a letter to my dad? This is a curse?” I asked her.

“I just want him to know how I feel living in such an old house while other women my age in the neighborhood have new houses,” she answered.

“The problem with my mom is that she always does things to delay or stop any progress we make in life,” Uncle chimed in.

“Whenever I find a job in a big city, she prays and cries everyday saying that she needs me back here, and then I end up losing my job and coming back home. I don’t know how helpful that is to her.” Uncle said. He lived on the same homestead with my Cucu.

Cucu was overcome by what she felt were our verbal attacks, and tears started rolling down her cheeks. She retrieved the letter from my hand, and grabbing her walking stick from the floor, she walked hurriedly towards her bedroom. Her back appeared to stoop more than usual this time. She supported herself with the walking stick in one hand while holding the letter in the other. She had the hand with the letter loosely lying on her back revealing the veins in her long slender hands and fingers that had become calloused over the years of peeling potatoes.

My twenty-seven-year old mind did not take time to try and understand Cucu’s feelings because I had already judged her action as selfish and mean. When she came back to the kitchen, we did not have time to discuss the issue further because my aunt and several cousins came by to say hi. We all sat there on the kitchen stools drinking hot tea. They informed us that chaos had erupted just near their area a few hours ago during a political rally. I was filled with fear and I wondered whether I would be able to make it back to Nairobi safely the following day. There

was no radio to update us on the situation of the country at large, or rather, there was a radio but the batteries were out, so we had to rely on eyewitness news like what we had just received.

Later that evening, I went to visit my mother's sister who lived nearby. I took the shopping that I had done for her, which had since been brought by my cousins from the shopping center. She was so thrilled to see me and when I told her that I was going to America, she hurriedly looked for a gift to send me off with. When she could not find something appropriate, she took two eggs from her meager stock; hurried to a neighbor and requested her to exchange them for cash. She reappeared with Ten Kenya Shillings; (about fifteen cents in American currency), and gave it to me. I was moved to tears by her love.

Later that evening, my Cucu asked if I was going to spend the night at her house, which I did whenever I went there. I did not mind sharing her bed. The only thing I regret is never buying her a mattress, even though I had slept on that hard bed with goat skin for a mattress time and again. It did not occur to me, until it was too late, to buy for her a more comfortable one. Uncle Alex and my aunt had asked me to spend the night at their house, which was on the same compound with my Cucu, so I had to turn down my Cucu's request, something that I regretted later since that was the last opportunity I had to spend time with my elderly Cucu. When I had been in America for about a year, I received news that my Cucu had passed away.

Uncle's house was more modern compared to my Cucu's. It was built of wood, but the spaces between the pieces of wood let in cold air freely. On the wall, Uncle had a collection of family pictures lined up. I saw my picture with my mom when I was about three years old. She had on a mini skirt, and she wore an afro. The other picture was of my Cucu holding my brother Joe, when he was about five years old. My Cucu's ear lobes were cut in a thin layer from top to

bottom. She wore long, thick, and seemingly heavy earrings which was the style in the 60s. My Cucu had tucked in her ears to remove the 1960s look when she became “modernized.”

Early the following day, I said good bye to my Cucu and other family members and Uncle Alex accompanied me to the center where I boarded a matatu to the city. When I got back to Nairobi, I did not tell dad about the letter, nor did I remind him of the promise we had made some years back to build a house for Cucu. I thought my silence would make the issue go away, but as I came to learn later, it did not. Instead, it reappeared in a different form years later.

Church: 1997-2003

We sang and danced a lot in the churches I attended in Nairobi and in Naivasha. The pastor at Nairobi Lighthouse Church was a white American but he danced just like one of the locals. He played the guitar and jumped up and down with it as he led praise and worship. His wife, Ms. Amy, played the keyboard. The congregation, which was comprised of hundreds of young people, mostly younger than forty at the time, joined in. People in the whole stadium jumped up and down, clapped and sang to the music. Before I left Kenya, one of the questions on my mind was “Where shall I go to church?” It was important that I find a church where I would find spiritual nourishment, and where I would be able to serve the Lord in whatever capacity He wanted me to serve. America has famous preachers like TD Jakes and Joel Osteen, but unless someone lives in Dallas or Houston, they can only listen to these preachers through the TV.

When I had settled down in Edmond, I started looking for a church that I could call my home church. I knew what I was looking for but I did not know where to find it; therefore, I accepted invitations from friends to visit their churches. I met a lady called Buki at work. Buki is

an American but her parents were born in Nigeria. I went to her church and my first thought was, I think I will fit in here in this black congregation. They were very hospitable. Most people said hi to me. I think I stuck out like a sore thumb, and they could tell I was new to the church. I wore brown dress pants; a white shirt, and black shoes. The ladies at the church were meticulously dressed. They wore either very stylish dresses, or colorful skirt suites with matching hats and shoes. Some of the hats were really large with a bow on the side, or a scarf around it. In Kenya, women dressed close to that when going to a wedding. The men were in suits. The church was relatively calm until the service begun.

The praise and worship team lead the songs and the congregation joined in. Soon the women and men went into this frenzied dance that I had never seen before. They left their seats, and filled aisles, dancing and vigorously shaking their bodies forward and backwards, and sideways, occasionally letting out a shout “Jesus!” “Oh, my! my! my! You good Jesus, you good!” I thought that someone would soon fall or lose their hat, but I was wrong. The hats stayed intact and everyone was still on their feet when the music ended. I stood and watched the whole time because I could not even hear the words in the loud music. The shouts and dancing also caught my attention and I could not focus on the worship.

When the preacher began the sermon, there was more drama. It was like the congregation was helping him preach. He would say,

“And Jesus got into the boat,”

And the congregation would add,

“Oh, yes, Jesus! Preach it brother.”

As the preacher gained momentum, I no longer heard the complete words but what came out of his mouth sounded like this,

“An thenah!, tha crowdah! Followdah! Himah!”

Someone in the congregation would stand, point a finger at the pastor and shout,

“Ooh, my God! OOOOh my God! Eeeih my God!”

Then a few people would break into a dance and some more would join in and the preacher would preach with more vigor until the sermon ended.

I felt very entertained, but I figured it would take me a while to understand a whole sermon, and so my search for a church continued. I attended Living Word Christian Outreach in Edmond, where I met John and we got married. Some members of the church, including us, had some disagreement with Pastor David Ash. John and I moved to Church on the Rock (COTR) in Oklahoma City. One unique aspect about COTR was the deliverance ministry. We heard the Apostle Dr. John Benefiel announcing from the pulpit that the church offers deliverance ministry to the members. He went on to explain that deliverance is an important service needed by all including those born again. He referred to Exodus 20:5 which says, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

I had a misconception about deliverance. I thought that only those possessed by demons required deliverance, but as Apostle John had explained it, some sins like idol worship in our blood line can continue to affect even born again Christians. I knew that my ancestors did not know Jesus, therefore I wanted every i dotted and every t crossed to make sure that my descendants and I did not carry the sins of our forefathers in our blood. I went for the deliverance and John did too. We were given packets with a questionnaire to fill out. The questions ranged from religious affiliations to marriage or relations issues and, just like the physicians do, the

questionnaire asks for information related to us and our forefathers as well. I remember I had a very hard time remembering people's names and some incidents that took place in my life when I filled the packet. I knew that the enemy was trying to deny me deliverance in some areas of my life. My deliverance was conducted by Pat Legako and Reece, at Pat's house. Pat is the leader of the deliverance ministry at COTR and she has published a book called *Deliverance: Rescuing God's People*. I was guided in renouncing any known and unknown idol worship in my bloodline and any habits that could give the devil a legal right into my life. At the church, we were also taught how to do self-deliverance. I had my deliverance session done as early in my marriage as I could because I did not want the devil to have any legal right to my children's lives.

Part Four: The Pregnancies.

The Miscarriages: 2003-2009

After our wedding in September 2002, I had just graduated with my Bachelor's Degree. I wanted us to have kids right away, but John wanted us to wait for a year and we had settled on that. I have loved children from the time I was a young girl. I felt like my two younger sisters were my own kids. When Phyllis was born in 1982, I was twelve; I used to take care of her like my own child. At church, I would not let anyone hold her. Mom's friends would come wanting to hold her, but I would find a way to keep her in my hands. When she was an infant, my mom used to dress her in small yellow flowered dresses with matching sweaters. We covered her with a warm hand-made yellow baby shawl. That is how she was dressed on Sundays when going to church. Her hair was curly, smooth and long. We used to call her British because of

her curly hair. Her little cheeks were chubby and begged to be kissed. I acted like her mother when my mom still lived and more so when she was gone. I even spent nights with her at the hospital when she was sick. When my mom passed on, Susan and Phyllis were so young and I wanted to protect them, so I made a subconscious decision that I would not get married until they were grown and able to fend for themselves. When my mom died, Susan was eight; Phyllis was two and I was fourteen. I wanted to shield them from danger, although I did not know what danger I was trying to shield them from.

I envisioned myself holding that precious gift from God in my hands day after day. Our house would have the beautiful smell of a newborn baby. It would smell of Johnson's baby wash, and Johnson's Baby Oil, and Johnson's Baby Powder. I would remember those days when I held Phyllis in my hands when I would not share her with anyone else, and I would imagine those days would come back soon, only this time, I would be holding my own baby. I wanted to have so many kids, but I also wanted to give them quality care. Time flew, and one day in May 2004, I started feeling so tired, and I could not wait to get home from work and go to bed. This feeling continued day after day. We decided I should take a pregnancy test. It was positive! John went straight to the computer and used one of the pregnancy calendars to figure out the due date.

"The baby is due in February!" He announced.

My joy could not be contained. I sat on the couch and wrote a shopping list for the baby.

"Where are we going to put the baby's crib?" I asked.

"We will move our bed to that end and put the crib over here," he said.

John does not mind my early planning, and so he complied with my preliminary plans. At the stores, we stopped by the baby center to check the cribs, the beddings, the car seats, and the little infant outfits that looked so cute, and noted the prices. We went to Motherhood Maternity at

Quail Springs Mall and bought three maternity dresses even though it was still too early to wear them. They were on sale, and I figured I would need them in the summer when my stomach was bigger. There wasn't much more we could plan so many months in advance, so our planning ended quickly.

“Let's call some friends and relatives and tell them the good news,” I said.

“Sawa, you go ahead and call. Who are you going to call?” He asked.

John prefers to keep things under wrap but I don't mind updating my sisters and probably a friend or two.

“I'll call my sisters, Susan, Phyllis, Mary and Jane, my Aunt in Eldoret (Kenya), my friends Betty in California, Liz in Boston and I'll call aunt and uncle in New Jersey (John's uncle) and” The list was endless. I said.

Then early the following week, I called my doctor and scheduled my first appointment. The day of the doctor's appointment soon arrived. As we drove to the OU Physicians Clinic, in Downtown Oklahoma City, we talked about the various baby names we had come up with, and we settled for Caleb because in the Bible Caleb was man of great faith. If it was a girl, we would name her Ana. In the Bible, Ana was a prayerful woman.

We got to the doctor's office and when my eyes rested on the half-dozen pregnant women sitting at the rectangular shaped reception area, my heart was elated knowing that I was one of them.

The wait seemed rather long. John and I were sitting at an angle where I had a good view of all the women in the room. I was taking a mental note of each one of them and trying to figure out how far along they were in their pregnancies. When I am about seven months pregnant, will I be wobbling like that woman? I wondered and smiled at the thought.

My name was finally called and John and I went inside. At the scale, I was anxious to know how much weight I had gained. It stopped at 154, I had gained about 5 pounds. A urine test confirmed I was pregnant. The nurse gave me a bag which contained a book called *Planning YOUR PREGNANCY and BIRTH*, and other materials to educate me during the pregnancy. The doctor came in and introduced herself as Dr. Elisa Crouse.

"You are six weeks pregnant." She informed us after reading my record.

"And your due date will be..." she paused as she turned the pregnancy wheel, "February 22nd." She announced.

I smiled joyfully at the news as I let the doctor proceed to do the ultrasound. A few seconds into the ultrasound, I saw the doctor moving the transducer probe frantically. The ultrasound revealed a normal pregnancy; however, no fetal heart rate was present.

"I can't see the heartbeat." The doctor's words hit me like thunderbolt.

I started praying in my heart that all would be well with the baby, but that was not the case. The baby had stopped developing at five weeks. The pain that filled my heart was beyond tears. I was lost in my thoughts wondering whether I had done something wrong to cause the baby's death. Had I slept the wrong way? Or did I work-out too much on the treadmill? I did not have an answer to my questions. I recollected my thoughts and paid attention to the doctor. John's countenance had changed. He looked very sad but alert.

"The other option you might want to consider is having a D & C." The Doctor said as she went on to explain the procedure of Dilation and Curettage.

"What was the first option?" I asked.

"The first option is to go back home and wait for the baby to come out on its own." She repeated.

"I will have the D & C." I said.

As soon as the doctor left our room, John came to my side and held my hand; hot, burning tears rolled down my cheeks unrestrained, as we sat there in silence waiting for the Doctor to come back. I could tell that John was very sad, too, because for a while he did not say a word. He stayed silent to internalize the sad news.

"Please call Susan," I said.

John called her and within minutes, Susan was there. Just like me, Susan expressed her grief in tears.

I was taken to the theater where I was numbed from the waist down and the D & C was done, then I was taken to the recovery room where John and I sat silently. Susan had already left to go to work. I was thinking of how all my expectations had been crushed. The loss created fear in me as it occurred to me that having children was not as easy as it appeared. We had asked Dr. Crouse if there was a probable cause for the miscarriage, but she could not pinpoint anything. For a moment, I thought about adoption, but there was a deep desire in me to have my own child, and felt the need to go ahead and try again. It was this desire that kept me trying time and again even when family and friends urged us to adopt. When I discussed this option with John, he did not want to consider it, and that encouraged me to know that we were on the same page. We were not opposed to adopting children, but not as an alternative to having our own.

When the anesthesia wore out, a nurse was sent to take me to the car in a wheel chair. She helped me into the wheel chair, and as we passed by the reception desk, she asked the nurse at the desk where my baby was. She was told I did not have any. She was very sorry because she had not read my report. Although I understood her completely, I could not erase the feeling of childlessness that filled my heart. From that day on, for many years to come, I battled with that

feeling as I came across people who would ask me about my children, or simply thought that a child standing next to me was my child and they started a conversation with that misconception.

We went home the same day. For a while as my body recovered from the D & C, the discomfort was a constant reminder of the loss. It was also hard to lose the little weight I had gained and my little pouch did not go away immediately. I wondered how it would be if the situation had been different—if I had come home with a child. I kept longing for that experience and I prayed that God would make it happen soon.

The following day Susan came to our apartment to visit. She told me that she and Daniel were expecting their first baby. She had not told me earlier because she had just found out, and that visit was the appropriate time to deliver the good news. I was very happy to hear some good news despite my loss.

“How far along are you?” I asked.

“About four weeks,” she said.

“I am so happy for you, and I believe that God will see you through,” I said.

I decided in my heart to be praying for her throughout her pregnancy. We informed dad about the loss when we got home. We had not told him that I was pregnant because it is not customary to tell a father. We just wait for them to see the stomach bulging. We do tell a mother who would in turn tell the father, but in my case, my stepmother was in Kenya and I had not updated her, either. Dad came with a friend to visit us and we felt comforted.

Members of our Rock Group from COTR, prayed with us and gave us very encouraging words. I tried to go back to normal life as best as I could. We took back the maternity clothes and the store attendant said, “I am sorry we cannot take them back.”

“We no longer need them,” I said.

“We will not accept them back. It is the store policy,” she said sternly and she started arranging some papers on the counter. It was obvious she did not want to continue with the conversation any further.

“I had a miscarriage, and I had not used the clothes. The tags are still on as you can see.”

“Oh, I am sorry to hear that. I will take them back,” she said; changing her expression to a sympathetic look.

I was glad that she took them back because I did not want any reminder of that pregnancy.

As much as I made an effort to forget the loss, I got occasional reminders when a friend or a relative who had not heard from me in a while would call to find out how the pregnancy was progressing.

“You must be big now?” a friend would ask, referring to my stomach.

“Eeh, emmm” I would be lost for words to say.

“We lost the baby,” I would finally gather enough courage to say the words.

“I am so sorry to hear that, I did not know that.”

Of course they did not know because I did not bother calling the people I had informed to tell them that I was no longer pregnant. Except for my sisters who I updated as soon as possible, the rest found out after several weeks or months, and only when they called to ask how we were doing. Some comforted me by telling me about their own experiences with a miscarriage or two, and even though that did not take away the pain, it helped me understand that miscarriage was common and I needed to contend for my baby through prayers next time I got pregnant.

After a few weeks, we decided to go ahead and try to get pregnant again. I thought I would get pregnant quickly, but it was in 2005 when I became pregnant again. The same

excitement as we had during the first one ensued, but this time I did not tell anyone. Not even my boss at work. One thing that bothered me was that I was not nauseous with the second pregnancy. I thought that nausea was an indication that the baby was developing and so the absence of nausea bothered me.

When I was four weeks pregnant, I had a dream and in the dream, I was seeing my late mom and dead infants. I woke up very troubled. I shared the dream with John and we prayed, but I felt in my heart there was more that needed to be done, but I did not know what it was. I started bleeding on the fifth week and when I went to the doctor I was told that the HCG levels were spontaneously falling and I miscarried. The feelings of fear filled my heart again, and I started wondering if I even wanted to get pregnant ever again.

John and I had already gone through deliverance at the church, but I felt like I needed to meet with the deliverance team again. I talked to Pat, the leader of the deliverance team at COTR and she arranged for me to meet with a team of two people in one of the conference rooms at the church during a Wednesday night service. We did not need to go through the whole deliverance session again, so I just told them about the miscarriages. Reece, one of the deliverance ministers asked me questions about my blood line. She asked,

“Were there cases of premature deaths in your family?”

“Yes, my mom died at the age of 45, and my parents had a child who died as an infant,” I said.

“We will pray against that spirit. Tell me, how are children named back in Kenya, are they named after a place, or another person? Because that can have a significant effect on someone,” She said.

“My middle name is Wanjiru and I was named after my maternal grandmother. That name had been given to the child who died as an infant, and then it was given to me.”

“We will pray to redeem your name from any connection of premature death.”

The team prayed with me and I was hopeful for the future.

As John and I tried to find the cause of the miscarriages, we thought it was because of the plot dad gave us during our wedding. We reasoned that since my late mom was buried there, maybe it was wrong for dad to give us that plot. We decided to forfeit it. We both took the small piece of paper that dad had given us back to him and explained that it would be good for him to be the custodian of mom’s grave and not us. We explained that we did not know if it was the cause of the miscarriages and we would appreciate it if he accepted the plot back. He did. He was troubled about the miscarriages too, and he tried to blame it on the processed foods here in America. He said that women in Kenya did not have miscarriages, but we knew that he was wrong.

The third time I had an ectopic pregnancy. One day early in the morning at around 3:00 AM in November, I was awakened by a sharp unbearable pain coming from the left side of my stomach. I had no idea what it was. By this time, we had moved into our new home in Edmond. I woke up and went to the bathroom, and then I noticed that I was bleeding. I told John and he took me to the ER at OU hospital. When the nurse read my form, she asked me to go to the examination room immediately, thus bypassing everyone else who had arrived before us. It was then that I knew that my condition was serious. The doctor came in and after doing an ultrasound she increased my fears because she suddenly looked very serious and angry. She took out her anger on John when she said in a stern voice,

“Can you get out and give us some privacy?”

John does not like confrontation, and I also don't argue with doctors especially when my condition calls for their mercy, so John obediently stepped out, but was allowed back in soon after. The doctor told us that I had a ruptured fallopian tube that needed to be removed immediately. I would be given general anesthesia. My heart sank at the news. I panicked at the thought of general anesthesia. I asked John to call Susan, my dad and Franco and tell them that I was going for surgery. I wanted to talk to them before I went to the OR. The news had caught me off guard and I did not think of prayer. As the nurse prepared to take me to the OR, I kept pestering John to call my family quickly.

“We first need to pray. I will call them later,” he said with finality.

“Oh, yes, we need to pray,” I said.

I have heard it said that fear is the opposite of faith. Fear causes someone to panic and act irrationally, and I had done exactly that. I did not tell John what my main fear was, but as soon as the nurse got out of the room, John held my hand and prayed. He prayed that the surgery would go well without complications and that I would wake up at the appointed time. The prayer calmed my fears for a moment. We had not told my family or our friends that I was pregnant, and so John was to give them all the news at once. He was also to call Greg and Marsha from our Rock Group. Things at the hospital were happening very fast and I was wheeled to the theater before John could make any call.

John was asked to wait in the waiting room as I was taken to the operating room. I remember seeing all the machines in the room that made me even more panicked. I changed into the hospital gown and my ring and jewelry together with the clothes were taken to John. I was told that Dr. Crouse was not in town but the doctor standing in for her was on her way to the

hospital. In the meantime, I was given the injection. After a few minutes, the doctor came and she approached me wearing the long theater gown.

“I am Dr. ...” She started to introduce herself, extending her hand to me.

Fear of death gripped me again and before she finished telling me her name, I burst out crying. She turned back and as I watched her disappear, I fell asleep.

When I woke up, I was transferred to a room where John joined me. I was thankful to God that I had woken up from the surgery.

“Sasa unaskia aje?” (“Hi how are you feeling?”) John said.

“Naskia Njaa,” (“I am hungry,”) I said.

“I will ask the nurse to get you something to eat,” he said.

The nurse came and told me that I could drink liquids for a start, and then I would progressively go into solid foods. She gave me some juice which calmed my stomach.

“Greg, Marsha and their children and Andy, and also Franco and dad are all in the waiting room. Who do you want us to call first?” John said.

“Call the friends from church first so that we can pray together and let them go. Dad and Franco might stay a while,” I said.

John did that, and Greg and the group came in and encouraged us and prayed for us. Dad and Franco came in after that and comforted us and prayed for us too. John and I stayed the night and I was discharged the following day. Greg and the group visited us at home regularly and their prayers and words of encouragement were comforting. We were also visited by friends from the Kenyan community who got to know what had happened and it was good for them to help us carry the emotional burden.

My heart was downcast, and I felt like I wore this sad look on my face all the time. Even though I attended parties like birthdays for my friend's kids, graduations and weddings, and life seemed to go on as normal, there was a longing in my heart that weighed me down. People around me did not appear to have the kind of problems I was having, and if they did, they hid it very well. One day in the summer I took a walk within our housing addition. It was early in the morning at around 8:30 am before the sun got too hot. The kids from the neighboring houses were still indoors; the two ladies who live together at the corner house were not out there weeding the flower bed. The whole place was quiet and peaceful. I wanted to experience that peace too but I did not know how to attain it. I turned the corner and took Peacock Street. An elderly lady, probably in her eighties, emerged from one of the houses; she wore a white shirt and was holding a white poodle on a leash. Her blond hair was neatly curled. Everything in her looked white and peaceful. She waved at me and I waved back. I put my feelings aside for a minute, and smiled at the lady. The young man who passed me in a truck waved and smiled. I smiled back. The world around me was urging me to be cheerful. There were so many things God had blessed me with that I should have been cheerful about. I was sure the old lady and the young man in the truck had had their fair share of problems in life too, but they didn't appear to be dwelling on them. I thought. I wanted to be cheerful and to forget that I didn't have a child, but no matter how much I tried, my heart wanted to dwell there. I prayed to God, "Please, God, if you are not going to bless me with children, please take my desire for children away." He did not.

Dr. Crouse prescribed Prometrium and she advised me to start taking it as soon as I became pregnant. The medicine was meant to prevent miscarriage, but it did not help. I miscarried again. The pregnancies were not going beyond five weeks. By this time, I was

devastated. I would stay home after a miscarriage and cry out to God, wondering what I did wrong to warrant this punishment. John and I stopped telling people whenever I got pregnant. We prayed together every evening and used scriptural references to strengthen ourselves. Then we decided to seek help from fertility specialists. Dr. Crouse suggested a specialist with the OU Physicians Center For Reproductive Health. I felt like that was the answer to our problem and I was so optimistic that we would have a baby. Dr. Karl Hansen took John and me through various tests for a month. According to the doctor's records, the tests included a test for Lupus, Leiden Factor V, Prothrombin (Factor II) for mutation analysis among others. The only one that came up positive was Urea Plasma culture. Dr. Hansen prescribed Zithromax for both of us.

After the treatment, the specialist informed us that we were free to try and get pregnant again. I conceived immediately. We had scheduled a week's vacation to Boston, so I started wondering whether we should go at all. I did not want anything to shake the baby just in case shaking was the cause for the miscarriages. Since we were going to fly I decided there wasn't going to be much shaking. We visited with our friends for a week and flew back to Oklahoma. After a few days, I miscarried. Dr. Hansen suggested that there were other ways he could assist me to get pregnant, but at this time, I just wanted to take a break and reflect on the situation. Meanwhile, a friend suggested that I change doctors, so I did. I started seeing Dr. Elisa Sparkes at Integris. She suggested that I visit Dr. Eli Reshef—an infertility specialist at Integris. I did. After reading the report from Dr. Hansen, he informed us that all the necessary tests had been done and he suggested that I either do a surgery to remove scar tissue, if any, from the ovaries, or to have In Vitro Fertilization. The surgery for the scar tissue was going to cost approximately \$7000 while the IVF would cost about \$12,000. If we opted for IVF, the doctor explained that in this procedure, he would retrieve several eggs (I don't remember the number) and fertilize them

outside the womb; then he would implant some in my womb, and freeze the rest. John and I were given printed material to take home, and read more information on this procedure. John was not opposed to trying any of the procedures, but as much as he hoped that one of them would be the solution, he allowed me to make the final decision.

After praying about the suggested surgeries, I did not have peace about either of them. I continued to pray for another week, but I still did not have breakthrough. I felt heaviness in my spirit whenever I tried to settle for the idea of the surgery. I did not take it as a warning from God; instead, I thought it was my own fears. My heart was so anxious and all I wanted was a quick way to get a baby. I was advancing in age and I needed a solution quickly. It seemed like I had reached the end of the road and the only option, and my only chance of having a baby was through the surgery. After discussing with John, we decided that I should try the surgery to remove scar tissue. We were going to use our savings to pay for it, and if it did not work, then we would try the IVF. I called upon the nurse to schedule a surgery, but she told me that a bed was not available at the hospital that week, so I was to call her again the next week to find out the bed's availability. I was going to school and I wanted the surgery done before the summer break was over. I still had three weeks to go and I figured I would need about a week or two to heal before I went back to school.

That night I had a dream that I was walking in a farm somewhere in America where cows were grazing. A friend of mine, who is a veterinarian, had performed surgery on the foot of one of the cows. As a result, the cow was unable to walk or to heal. It lay there miserably. Due to my anxiety, I misinterpreted the dream to mean that I needed to have the surgery. I totally disregarded the fact that the cow did not heal. So, I called upon the nurse the following week. Unfortunately, or fortunately, a bed was still not available, so she told me to call her again later

that week. Looking back at the dream now, I understand that it was a warning that the surgery was not going to heal my problem. It was an indication that God did not want me to proceed with the surgery, but I did not understand the message that way at the time.

It was hard to be still and wait upon God, and even though I remembered the dream about the cow that did not heal after the surgery, I still wanted to go ahead and schedule the surgery. Just before I called the nurse again to schedule an appointment that week, God gave me another dream which I shared with John.

“Last night I had this dream where I saw myself walking back to our house. When I was close to getting home, I saw a car coming from the opposite direction and it stopped in front of me. The driver asked if I needed a ride and I agreed, even though the car was going in the opposite direction. The moment I entered the car, I realized I had made a mistake, but it was too late to get out. The driver drove recklessly, bumping into trees and houses and even hitting people. When we got to a market place, the driver was hitting other cars and walls and I knew it was time to disembark and walk home. I managed to get out and my heart was thumping so fast I could not be still; then I heard a voice tell me “I told you to wait!” I woke up to find my heart beating just like in the dream. I remembered the scripture in Psalm 46:10, and I woke up to pray,” I said.

“I believe God is telling us to wait. What do you think?”

“I think so too. I will not schedule the appointment then.”

“Sawa, that sounds good. We will continue to seek God for direction.”

“Sawa.”

We decided that God was warning us from proceeding with the surgery to remove scar tissue and the IVF too, and we did not pursue either any further. By this time, I had already had

the sixth miscarriage, and I remember telling John, "We cannot continue doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results." John's response was, "If God is the Almighty God, then you can be sure we will have children. He will prove himself faithful."

I had a friend called Marcy and she had had some problems with miscarriages too. She encouraged me to try Dr. Darren Goff, her OBGYN at Mercy Physicians. My visit to Dr. Goff was very encouraging. Even though my history of miscarriages would baffle anyone, he was very encouraging. After reading my report from Dr. Hansen, he suggested that he could prescribe to us another dose of Zithromax for Urea Plasma, just in case it was still an issue, although, he said, he did not think it could cause miscarriage. John and I had scheduled to travel to Kenya in December that year (2009). Dr. Goff prescribed the medicine and told me that he hoped that I would be pregnant by the time I came back from Kenya. I was very encouraged by his words and I actually looked forward to being pregnant that December.

Looking Back

Throughout the miscarriages, our friends at Church on the Rock stood with us in prayer. Some members of the church did not even inform us that they were praying for us, but we came to learn of it much later. For some time, my constant prayer request at our Rock Group meeting was for children until I realized that there was need to focus on other issues. To keep my mind off the childlessness, I volunteered to help at the children's church on Sundays. I started teaching Pre-K class once a month. Our friends, Vivan and Jasper Nzedu at the church, had faith that we would have children. They even gave us a bassinet, a car seat and other baby items. We were very encouraged by their gesture. I assembled the bassinet and prayed over the items, trusting

God that we would have a child to use them. I had to keep hope and maintain persistence towards my goal through prayer.

Our families were equally concerned about our situation. Phyllis, who was still in Kenya at the time, sent me a prayer cloth with specific instructions. I was receptive to anything provided it did not violate the word of God, so I followed her instructions and believed in God for a breakthrough. I was to take that piece of cloth that she had had prayed over at her church, and put it on any part of my body for seven days. Susan, as always, carried my burdens as if they were her own. Her tears spoke volumes. Mary told me that once I allowed the peace of God to fill my heart, and I stopped being anxious about the situation, God would answer my prayer. At that time, it was hard for me to have peace, and I did not know how to cultivate peace within me.

On the other hand, John was or at least appeared calm throughout this period, and he did not succumb to pressure from family and friends. He kept steering me to the word of God for encouragement. My mother-in-law was very concerned about our situation and she had suggested that we needed to go to Kenya and she would introduce us to a good doctor there. My sister-in-law too was of the same opinion. From what I know now, I am glad that John did not jump at this suggestion and send me flying to Kenya for another (doctor's) opinion.

Along with this comforting and reassuring support from family and friends also came rebuke and ridicule from people that I thought, all along, understood my situation. A lady I went to church with came to our house one day and gave us a book on Faith, and then sent me a text message later saying that our house was "filthy with disbelief" (lack of faith). All I did was to take those issues to God in prayer, and I cut her out of our lives. A relative of mine, I was told, criticized me, asking why, if I am a woman of prayer, my prayers for a child had not been answered. Later, I used these words to petition God for a breakthrough.

The most scathing attack came from my dad, which left me in shock and disbelief. John and I had just arrived home from the hospital after I had had surgery to remove the fallopian tube. We were both exhausted physically, and our spirits were hurting, not to mention that our tummies were hungry, too. The house felt lonely and I just needed words of comfort. I needed someone to reassure us that all was well, and God was with us even during this very difficult time. John went to the kitchen to cook something for dinner after assisting me to the couch where I sat down to rest. The phone rang, and it was my dad.

“Hello,” I said.

“Hello,” Dad said.

“Nimukinyire mucii?” (“Have you arrived home?”)

“Ee twi mucii.” (“Yes, we are home.”)

“Riurii, gitumi kiria kiratuma nda ciaku ciume nitondu John augire niagacoka kuriha ruracio, no ndacokire.” (“The reason you are having miscarriages is because John promised to come back and pay off the dowry but he has never come back.”)

I could not believe my ears. At this point, I was not sure what hurt me most; whether it was the fresh stitches in me, or the unthoughtful, selfish and untimely words I just heard from my dad.

“Reke nitugakuhurira muthenya ungi,” (“Allow me to call you another day,”) I said and I hung up the phone.

I felt disappointed, and rejected. I now had another wound to nurse. The stitches were hurting deep in my stomach, but dad’s words pierced deep into my heart. “How could dad be asking us for money at this time? Is my value to him just monetary?” I wondered.

I remembered the words of the scripture in Isaiah 49:15 which say “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she had borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you.” Although the word of God was reassuring, I was unable to keep my mind focused on it, because my thoughts kept rushing back to my dad’s words. The conversation kept replaying in my mind like a scratched CD stuck on one word playing it over and over again and unable to move forward. My mind got so tired and overwhelmed with these thoughts and all I wanted was to lie down in bed and sleep off the misery, but I needed to wait for John to come and help me up and take me to the bedroom.

While in the kitchen, John had overheard my short conversation with dad, and he had thought that dad was coming over to see us. When he finished cooking rice and chicken stew, he put some on the dining table and helped me to the table, and asked if dad was coming over.

“I hope not!” I said.

“Why, do you want some time to rest?” He asked.

“Well, I do want to rest, especially after talking to him,” I said and proceeded to narrate my conversation with dad.

“That’s absurd! Is dowry that much more important to him than your health?” John commented in anger. After a short silence, John asked, “Did he say how much he wants from us?”

“No, I did not ask.”

We sat there eating our dinner as we discussed the dowry issue. We analyzed how the whole dowry tradition came about and we concluded that because in the olden days children did not go to school, but stayed at home until they got married, parents considered their girls as assets who helped with tilling the land and grazing cows, so when a girl got married, parents

wanted compensation for losing a valuable worker. As a result, some parents preferred to have their daughters get married to wealthy families who could pay a hefty dowry fast. Since most young men did not have wealth of their own, the older men married young girls as second, third or even fifth wives because they could afford to pay the dowry. We decided that it was unrealistic for parents to be asking for dowry for their daughters, since girls were now educated and they financially supported their parents whenever there was need, whether they were married or not, just as much as the boys did.

Our opinion did not matter because we had an obligation to pay off the dowry. John and I agreed that we should go ahead and pay dad whatever amount he wanted. I called Franco, who also lived in Edmond at the time, and after telling him the story, I asked him to find out from dad the amount he wanted from us. He called me back and said that dad wanted \$1,000 which would clear the perceived debt. We asked my brother to come and get a check from us and take it to him, which he did. We called our friends, Greg, Marsha and Andy and told them about the issue with dad. They visited us and told us to forgive him and they prayed with us. We forgave dad, but I needed time to heal, so I did not call him that week as I always did.

I stayed home for a week and then went back to work. At the time, both John and I worked for Planning and Zoning Resource Corporation. I tried to concentrate on work as much as I could, which helped take my mind off the miscarriage. On Friday the week I returned to work, I received a call from dad at mid-morning. We had not communicated from the time we paid his money.

“Hello,” I said.

“Hello, why have you not called me all this time?” he yelled from the other end.

“I don’t have a particular reason for it; I just want to reflect on my life.” From his voice and approach, I sensed that he was up to no good. I immediately started to pray in the spirit.

“I want you to go and read the Bible, the book of Proverbs 6:16-19. You need to understand that your dad is everything to you...” His voice sounded stern.

I could not take it anymore. Dad had pushed me beyond the limit. I was at work and I could not engage in this conversation any further.

“I will call you tomorrow,” I said and I hung up.

I really needed time alone to pray about this issue, and the office was not the ideal place for it. I closed my door briefly and bent my head on the desk and said, “God, help me to find time today at home to pray about this issue.” That was all I could pray at that time. I left my office and went to find John. He was in his office busy working. I narrated to him all that dad had said.

“You need to tell him that God is everything to you and not him,” John said.

I agreed with him and I called dad immediately while still in John’s office,

“Dad, I want to correct you. You said that I need to know that my dad is everything to me, please know that that is incorrect. My God is everything to me,” I said.

Dad said okay and he hung up. Having had this experience, I could see the human weakness in dad that I never knew existed when I was younger. I used to think my dad was everything to me and that he could solve all my problems. Most of all, I never expected him to do anything to hurt me, but after this incident, I acknowledge the fact that it was only God who is without fault.

John and I looked up Proverbs 6:16-19 and it says “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a

heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” We discussed these words and we could not figure out why dad told me to read them. When we got home that evening, I went straight to the guest bedroom and lay flat on the carpet and prayed. I sought God’s direction on what to tell dad, and He impressed on my heart, the scripture in Isaiah 49:25. It says in part, “... I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save.” This is the first time I had noticed that scripture. I had probably read it before, but I had not internalized it. I went and shared with John what the spirit of God had put in my heart. We also prayed together and the following day at around 10 o’clock in the morning, I called dad .

“Hello,” Dad answered. He sounded low and no longer fiery like the day before.

“Hello, I wanted to discuss the issue you called me about yesterday,” I said.

“Let’s not talk about it now,” he said.

“Why?” I asked.

“I lost my job yesterday,” he said.

“Why, what happened?”

“I was told that they were downsizing.”

“I am sorry to hear that. However, I also wanted to give you a scripture to read like you gave me yesterday. Please read Isaiah 49:25. The lord says that He will contend with those who contend with me and he will save my children,” I said.

“Okay, we will talk another day,” he said.

“Okay, bye.”

From that time on, dad reached out to us in a friendlier manner. Our relationship with him was restored and he invited John and me to his apartment for dinner during Christmas,

Thanksgiving, or on regular weekends as he did before, and in return we also resumed our friendly gesture and took him to restaurants for a meal, invited him to our house and bought him birthday gifts and father's day gifts as well. He prayed for us to have children. We also prayed with him to find a job. He found one after searching for about two or three months.

In my quest for an answer for my troubles, I felt like I needed to repent to anyone I had wronged. I called my older brother Joe and asked for his forgiveness over something I had done to him. I don't even remember what it was. Next I visited my dad in Edmond not far from where we lived, and I asked him to forgive me over a disagreement I had had with my step mother. When I was still in high school and back in Kenya, my step mother, who was pregnant at the time, had had some disagreements with dad. Instead of working it out with him, she had taken it out on my Cucu who was living with us at the time.

My Cucu was probably in her seventies at the time. Our U-shaped house had all the doors facing the center. My Cucu and my sisters, Susan and Phyllis, were in the kitchen eating dinner when we heard a knock at the door. It was Muthoni, my step mother. I rushed to the door because I did not want her to come where my younger sisters were, and I stood at the door. My Cucu came quickly and stood by the door as well.

"Come and get me my clothes," Muthoni said.

"You go get them yourself. It is your bedroom after all," I said.

The lantern in the kitchen did not illuminate the area outside, so I did not realize that Muthoni carried a big stick in her left hand. I only saw it when she lifted it up and aimed it at my Cucu. I put my hand in the air across my Cucu and the stick landed on my arm. Muthoni dropped it and took off running. She was about six months pregnant. I thought she had only hit me, and so it was not a big deal, but when my Cucu turned to me and said,

“Please check my shoulder and see if it’s bleeding,”

“Did she hit you?” I asked furiously. I did not know that the stick managed to land on Cucu’s shoulder. I checked her but I could not see much in the dim light. I told Cucu to sit down on the chair and wait for us, and then I told Susan, “Let’s follow her.” I took the stick that she had dropped and pursued her. It was around 9:00 pm, and darkness had set in, but we could tell her shape in the dark. Dad had sent a male worker from the restaurant to come and watch over us because he suspected that Muthoni would act up. Ngumo, the worker, steered me on with his words.

“Let’s go, don’t get tired,” he said as he ran together with Susan and me.

When Muthoni, who was hiding outside the gate heard us, she took off running towards downtown.

“Keep moving,” Ngumo encouraged me when I appeared to get tired.

Muthoni ran fast like a marathon runner. I could not catch up with her, until she got to a hill which exhausted her. By then, I had stopped running and I was panting so hard. Muthoni stumbled on a rock and fell. She rolled several times then got up. I panicked and hoped that she would not lose her baby. When she stood up, she continued to run for her life. She was heading to downtown, which was about five miles away from our house. She wanted to get to our restaurant where dad was working. There were hardly people walking or driving on the neighborhood street. Most of the houses had their lamps out. By the grace of God, I did not hit Muthoni, instead, I had pity on her when I saw her struggling to keep running for her life, like a deer being chased by a lion. I instructed Susan and Ngumo to stop pursuing her. I felt like I owed dad an apology for having chased his wife. Even though I had not hit her, I still wanted to rid myself of any mistakes in my life that could give the devil a legal right to hinder my

breakthrough, and may be God would free me from barrenness. Although dad divorced her, I still needed to apologize to him for my actions.

Next, I knew that John and I owed our former pastor and his wife an apology. When John and I were going to Living Word Christian Outreach, we were among the leaders of the church and we had had a disagreement with the Pastor David Ash of LWCO over finances. John was not opposed to the idea of apologizing to the pastor, so I called the pastor's wife and when she did not answer my call, I sent her a text message. Although I never got a response, it cleared my conscience. I was not ashamed of apologizing to anyone that I had wronged and I did not hesitate to do it. I was ready to do anything that could release me from barrenness as long as it was not a sin. After the apologies, my problem with the pregnancies was still not resolved. I had done all that came to my mind as a possible solution, and once I exhausted all my avenues, I knew that I needed to be still and wait upon God.

The Dreams: 2003-2007

One thing that was prevalent during all the pregnancies is that I would dream seeing dead children, my late Cucu, or my late mother. Occasionally, I would see my dad too in the dreams. The dreams would come as soon as I discovered that I was pregnant, and then soon after that, I would miscarry. Whenever I dreamed of my dad, he would appear at a place where I had gone to seek help like an office where I would be pursuing a certain issue, and then he would come and sit there next to me not saying a word. When I would wake up from the dream, I was always just shy of getting the help that I needed. Whenever I dreamed of my late mother, I would see her grave and I would be eating very dirty food that looked like discharge from a wound.

Then I would wake up. My late Cucu would appear to me in the dreams looking thin and emaciated. She would be wearing dark clothes. I don't remember exactly what she did in the dreams, but I remember dreaming a lot about her.

Other times I would dream that I was at her farm in Boiman, and I would be climbing a very tall mountain to get to my destination. My destination would be a house far off up the mountain. Then I would exert all the energy within me to reach the top of the mountain. Once on top, I would find a level path on which I would start walking towards my destination, but a fierce bull would come and block my way then the dream would end before I got to the destination. Other scary dreams were when I would see myself either deep in the ocean having been attacked and blood all over me, or when I would see myself deep in a hole unable to come back to the surface. I also dreamed that I was trying to rescue some infants from being killed and I was frantically trying to reach the police, but I was unable to dial the number. Eventually the infants would all be killed, as I remained there helpless.

The dreams came after every pregnancy without fail, and with time, I knew that I was about to miscarry when I dreamed them. I did not have peace at all as I was tormented by all these dreams and miscarriages, and I did not know what to do. I would pray that I would not have the miscarriages, but it still happened, until I wondered why God was not answering my prayers, and then I felt helpless and defeated for I did not know where else to turn. I knew God is the Almighty and therefore, there was no other power that I could turn to. At the time, I did not understand that my anxiety was preventing me from hearing from God. When I shared the dreams with Mary, she sent me a book called *Understanding Your Dreams, A Guide to Spiritual Warfare Through Dreams*, by Pastor John Otaala. After reading the book and using the prayers suggested in it, all the bad dreams stopped effectively, and I was thankful to God for that.

Now when I look back and try to analyze the dreams, I realize that I never dreamed praying for the infants, or praying against the attacks that I faced, instead, I tried to get help from the police or I just let the attacks happen without my resistance. I understand that the dreams reflected my spiritual condition which needed spiritual understanding, but I sought natural help from doctors (police). I also understand that the dreams about my mother and the dead infants represented premature death, and the dreams about Cucu and about Boiman showed me the source of the problem. It was in Boiman that I was trying to reach my destination but I was prevented by a fierce bull. The bull represented a curse. Where I saw my dad sitting silently in places where I had gone to get certain help, I now understand that it meant dad was the subject of the curse even though he was oblivious to its existence.

After the sixth miscarriage, I had lost hope of ever having children. In the evenings as we prayed before going to sleep, I would wonder if I would ever hold my own baby in my hands, and if I did, how that baby would come into our lives. “Will this child come from my womb or will God cause someone to drop a child outside our house and we go rescue and adopt it?” I wondered.

Having a baby appeared to me like a far-fetched dream. I even became fearful of getting pregnant, but above all, I became so afraid of death. I avoided talking about death and I did not want people to talk about it in my presence. I avoided funerals, and I just felt like death was holding me captive. I felt like I was climbing a very tall mountain and I did not have any strength left in me to reach the top, but my desire for a child would not let me give up trying.

I remember waking up one night very early in the morning to pray. My mind was not at peace. Many thoughts were going through my mind. I became suspicious of everyone including my husband, even though I knew that John was suffering emotionally just as much as I was. For

a moment, I wondered whether he was the cause, but after thinking deeper about it, I could not see how he could cause me to have miscarriages. I thought I was losing my mind, and I got terrified. I had a headache that could not go away. I did not know if I was in a depression, but I did not like the feeling in my mind. I could not allow myself to go on with that feeling, and so I made up my mind that I would seek God until He gave me the answer. I knew that there was something behind those miscarriages because the book of Proverbs 26:2 says that a curse without a cause will not alight. I knew the repeated miscarriages were a curse after I had tried what I could with the doctors and nothing worked. I had also repented all I knew to repent and I still had the problem. I had had it and I was not going to sit there and continue to have the miscarriages. As I paced in the living room, I remembered that one time John had told me, when I had insisted that we needed to see a counselor at the church, that God was able to give us the answer directly. We just needed to keep praying.

That night, I forced myself to be still and pray, and it was at that time that it dawned on me that I had only two choices: to give up the fight and live without children or to seek God seriously and find a solution. I needed to find out the cause of the miscarriages. On Saturday, I went to Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City to pray. The Spirit of God gave me Psalm 46:10, which says,

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

That was God’s answer. He wanted me to be still, which was the hardest thing for me to do at the time. How did God expect me to be still when I was thirty eight years old; had had six miscarriages; had prayed all this time and had no answer in sight? I thought. I did not realize that

God had been speaking to me all this time, through other people and even through the dreams, but I was too anxious to hear Him, and that was why He told me to be still in order to hear Him.

Revitalizing faith in my anxious heart felt like climbing a very tall mountain, where I needed to exert all the strength in me to reach the top. It was an uphill task. I understood from the Book of Proverbs 26:2 that, "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not rest." Because of the repeated miscarriages and after searching the scriptures, I knew that I was under a curse, and there was a course for it, but I did not know the course.

I diligently sought God for peace because I understood that that was what God wanted me to have first and foremost. Because of my anxiety, and the need to rush against time, I had failed to wait upon God to know how He wanted to solve my problem. So I had embarked on a series of solutions that I thought in my natural mind were right and the solutions, as a result, had delayed my answer and prolonged my misery. I believed now that if God had wanted to heal my barrenness through a physician, like He had done for many people, He would have allowed me to do the IVF. But He does not have only one method of solving a problem. He might have used a physician to heal someone else but He wanted to use a different method to heal me, and so when He wanted me to be still, it's because He wanted me to listen to Him as He revealed to me the root cause of the problem and what we were going to do to fix it.

The Bible says in the book of Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Early in the morning every day when I woke up to pray, I would ask God to give me peace as He dealt with my barrenness. I understood that to have faith in God was to be confident that He was able to handle the situation no matter how impossible the situation seemed.

I was still taking my English classes at UCO and I had a class that ended at around 4:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I made it a point to spend some time praying for peace once I got home after class, before engaging in the house duties. With time, I realized that I no longer worried about childlessness and I had peace in my heart. The anxiety was all gone and I no longer focused on my age, instead, I focused on God's glory. I would go on my knees and instead of crying like I did before and questioning God as to why he had not given us children, I started telling God that I was confident that He would bless us with a child because He is the one who created us and it would be for His glory. I started reasoning with Him asking how He expected me to testify to His power when I could not prove it in my own life. I would ask Him,

“LORD, how will I convince others that you are able to heal, when you have not healed me from barrenness?”

I would tell Him that the enemy was not challenging me, but rather he was challenging His (God's) power.

“Lord the battle is yours, I am called by your name, and it is your name at stake,” I prayed.

At the church, leaders and other members of the church had given us prophecies that we would have children. John and I frequently read the prophecies, and we prayed that God would fulfill His promises to us. I totally surrendered my worries, fears, sorrows, and anxieties to God, and they never bothered me again. I knew deep in my heart that we were going to have a baby.

Breaking the Curse: 2008

God never fails. At midnight on November 9, 2008, I had a dream that John and I were in possession of a letter that belonged to someone else. The letter was not properly sealed, so we

opened it and read the contents. It was for my dad, Samuel Mwaura. It was sent by a lady called Njeri. The letter was a complaint of a promise dad made but never fulfilled. I woke up as soon as the dream ended, and I sensed that the dream had some meaning, so I proceeded to the living room to pray.

As I lay prostrate on the carpet seeking God, the Holy Spirit started giving me understanding of the dream. He reminded me of the time, around 1997, when I was still back in Kenya, when I had visited Cucu Njeri, she had given me a letter to read, in which she was pouring out her anger against my dad. Her complaint was that my dad had promised to build her a new house, but he never fulfilled his promise. I knew the letter was a curse being cast upon my dad, so I became very angry and argued with Cucu. She did not renounce the curse, but she retrieved her letter from me and took it back to her bedroom. I never conveyed the message to dad. I understood that my father's curse had fallen on me because I did not deliver the message. As I continued to listen to the Spirit of God, He reminded me that on a different occasion earlier on, dad, my siblings and I had visited Cucu and she had brought up the issue of the house. At that time, we all promised to chip in and build the house, but we never carried through with the promise.

As days went by, John and I sought God for direction on how to break the curse. We had learned a lot about curses from Church on the Rock and from the deliverance we had gone through. God impressed on me the need to ask my family members to contribute the money we were to use for the house and to send it to the church where Cucu attended. By God's grace, I did not encounter any opposition from my dad or my seven siblings, so we figured that it would cost about \$250 to build a wooden house like those typically found in the country side where my Cucu lived. In February, 2009, Jane, Joe, Dan, Mary, Phyllis and their spouses got together and

travelled to Boiman in Nyahururu. In the U.S., Dad, myself, Franco and Susan contributed money and sent it to them, and together with what they contributed, took it as an offering.

On the day of their arrival in Boinam, they all met at Uncle Alex's house where they prayed together. Mary and I had come up with a list of prayer issues to deal with to break the generational curse. Among the issues, we were to break the spirit of pre-mature death and the curse from Cucu. They were all in agreement and after prayers, they took the money to the church where Cucu used to attend. They explained to the pastor that our family had wanted to build a house for Cucu but she died before that happened, therefore, we contributed the money to build the house of God. We gave the money as a special offering to the church. The pastor prayed over them and blessed them. The pastor testified that they had been praying and trusting God for building fund and it was such a miracle the way God had answered their prayer. When I was praying after the event, the spirit of God led me to the book of Haggai 2:18 & 19 which says in part,

“...give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid... from this day on, I will bless you.”

This word was the confirmation that God had broken the curse from me and He was going to bless us with children. I held on to this word and I did not waiver.

Part Five: The Visit to Kenya: December 12th – 27th 2009

Kenya's Beauty

I had just completed my classes in the fall 2009 and I was in high spirits because we were going to travel to Kenya that December. I looked forward to seeing my siblings, my country of birth, John's family, and all my family and relatives. I had no stress at all since I was no longer

focused on getting pregnant as the primary goal in my relationship with John. We enjoyed our intimacy without pressure or anxiety. I did not need to count the dates or use Clearblue Ovulation Kit any more. We just wanted to have fun.

We travelled as scheduled. Kenya had changed considerably from the time each one of us was there last. Kids had grown, the population had increased, activities had intensified and traffic lawlessness was at its peak. My mother-in-law had been telling John that she wanted us to go home and visit John's aging grandparents before they passed on. She wanted them to bless us. We had been planning to go to Kenya year after year but it was never the right time until that December. We had made an itinerary and distributed to my family and his. We would be in Kenya for only two weeks, so we had to manage our time wisely. John had changed jobs and he did not have much vacation time accumulated. We decided we would take those two weeks to go and visit family, especially John's aging grandparents. I did not have any living grandparents. Since it was our first time going back after staying in America for ten plus years, we dedicated the whole visit to family and friends. We would not have time to tour the beach at the coast or the beautiful game parks in various parts of the country, but we were content with our itinerary.

My mother-in-law was at the airport to meet us and so were my sister-in-law, Kethi, my brother-in-law, Kilonzo, my brother, Joe and my nephew, Kevin. It was such a joy to see family again after such a long time. We hugged each one of them and after chatting a little; we got into my in-law's Volkswagen and headed home. It was in the afternoon and the five o'clock rush had not started to build up yet, but the roads looked crowded with pedestrians as if a soccer tournament had just ended, and people were heading home. Matatus were all over the road trying to overtake each other.

“Oh my goodness, that matatu is going to hit the pedestrians!” I shouted when I saw a matatu get off the road and was being driven on the side walk. The matatu conductor was hanging on the door with one hand holding on to the handle at the entrance and the other hand swinging front to back motioning the pedestrians to move from the way. His torso was hanging outside the vehicle. He shouted, “Get off the road if you don’t want to be hit!” “You old man, move and stop daydreaming there!” “Hey siste, niaje? Mambo? Unataka ride?” (“Hi sister, what’s up? How are you doing? Do you want a ride?”) The conductor yelled, and talked changing his tone depending on the individual he was addressing.

Pedestrians walking along the road would scamper to the grass to avoid the matatu and those sitting at the bus stop like the “sister” would just sneer at him. When the matatu was way ahead, it forced its way back into the road in front of a private car.

“That’s how they drive nowadays. The pedestrians have to watch them,” My mother-in-law said.

Soon we saw a matatu come from behind us and the driver wanted us to give him way. He was also driving on the sidewalk. Kilonzo did not give him room. The matatu driver opened his window and motioned with his hand as if to ask, “What’s up?” and yelled;

“Niaje wewe unaharibu biashara?” (What’s up with you, you are spoiling my business?)

Kilonzo opened his window and said,

“Potea!” (“Dissappear!”) and he rolled the window back up.

“This is chaotic!” John said.

“What would you do if the matatu driver turned violent on you?” I asked.

I was already scared and I wondered whether we would get home safely. My eyes were glued on the road. All three lanes were full of vehicles, which were moving slowly especially due to the mayhem caused by the matatus.

“That is why we keep this rungu nearby.” Kilonzo retrieved a long thick round stick like a club from the floor and showed it to us.

“So your adrenaline is constantly high when driving?” John asked.

“Not really, we are used to this lifestyle. It’s no big deal,” Kilonzo said.

“Can you guys drive here?” My mother- in-law asked.

“For me, I will not try. These matatus will freak me out,” I said.

John was not scared of the matatus and he drove during our visit. As we got near to the city, just before we crossed a roundabout I spotted the matatu that had passed us a few minutes ago. It was standing by the side walk. I noticed that there was a police officer who had stopped it. Matatu drivers and conductors in Kenya used to be very casual with the traffic police. Sometimes when they were stopped the driver would ask the conductor if he had some cash handy to bribe the officer and if they had not made enough trips that day, the driver would motion with his hand to the police officer that they would circle back with him. The officer would let them go and he would get his bribe when the matatu came back around that day. On this particular day, I stuck my head out the window just in time to see the conductor walking towards the police officer. He was holding something covered in his palm. He shook hands with the officer and turned around and headed back to the matatu. “Feew!” He whistled to signal the driver that all was well and to drive on. The conductor ran and ducked onto the matatu as it sped off.

“It’s called the golden handshake,” John said.

“That is why the matatus will continue to break the law,” I said.

As we neared Nairobi City, I could see KICC (Kenyatta International Conference Center) the twenty-eight story cylindrical structure towering over the buildings along Harambee Avenue. The building, one of Kenya's landmarks, was built in 1973. It was named after the First President of the Republic of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. Even though it is no longer the tallest building in the city, it still attracts a lot of visitors. In addition to having an international conference center, it also houses a revolving restaurant at the top which offers a panoramic view of the city, rotating 360° in 76 minutes. KICC is not the only place that attracted local and international visitors, but Bomas of Kenya is one of the main tourist attractions in Nairobi.

Bomas of Kenya is a cultural center where they entertain visitors with cultural shows. Maasai Warriors, among other traditions, entertained visitors there. They were clad in their full traditional attire comprised of striped red and blue shuka (decorative piece of cloth) around their torso, belts made of beads around their waist and hips, long necklaces made of colorful beads over their necks, across the chest and under the armpits all the way to their back. Hairs braided with the red maasai braids, and a spear in hand. They were all lean and tall; about six feet tall. They jumped about three feet high up holding up the spear in one hand when performing their traditional dance. The Maasai were the only people who had been allowed to carry a weapon publicly in Kenya. They are semi-nomadic people and a spear was their weapon when hunting for game in the wild forest.

The city was a beehive of activities. There were pedestrians walking in all directions. Private cars appeared to have increased in number from the last time I was there. New skyscrapers had been erected. The major difference was that the matatus were no longer permitted in the city center, (the matatus that we travelled with along Uhuru Highway turned onto Harambee Avenue and avoided the city center) and so there was some semblance of order.

However, the human population appeared to have escalated. We had rolled down the windows in order to grasp a full view of the city. The temperature was around 28°C (68°F). I could see Uhuru Park across the street to my left. There were people lying on the grass enjoying the setting sun at the recreational garden. Most jobless people spent their days there killing time. I smelled the dust of my country of birth again after so many years in the U.S.

The journey took us two hours to get home; a distance of forty-five minutes' drive. The Garden Estate house used to be owned by a Briton. My father-in-law had bought it in 1970s.

“The guards used to sit here at the gate,” John told me. He was referring to the security guards that his dad used to have when he was the Electoral Commissioner of Kenya. I looked at the steel gate and nodded. The compound had a section with trees at the front which produced good shade. There was a small flower garden directly in front of the house endowed with red roses, and some beautiful bushes of yellow and white flowers. The driveway was paved with the smooth decorative stones all the way to the door step. There was a sense of order in the air. Kilonzo dropped us in the front of the two story house. My father-in-law sat on a bench just outside the kitchen. There was a jiko (charcoal stove) in front of him from which he warmed himself. He told us that he was usually cold and he warmed himself with the jiko daily. His hair was now greyer and he was skinnier than the last time I had seen him when he visited the U.S. in 2003. He was a little aged, too. He was in his early 70s. John and I walked straight to him and we shook hands,

“Wacha,” he greeted me in Kamba. The greeting in Kamba was all the Kamba John's parents spoke to us. John's family communicates in English, which I find quite formal. Whenever I am with my dad or my siblings, we mostly speak Kikuyu or Swahili. Occasionally, we will speak in English.

“Aah,” I answered the way I was taught by my in-laws.

Both my father-in-law and my mother-in-law laughed. I think I didn't pronounce the word well.

“Welcome home,” my father-in-law said and he ushered us in to the house.

The house boy and the house girl were both there to meet us too. Any middle class person in Kenya can afford to engage the services of house boy or a house girl because their wages are not high, and there was no minimum wage requirement. After greeting us, they took our luggage to the guest house within the compound, while John and I went into the main house with our parents.

The house had about two or three sets of sofas. I didn't count the sets, but I remember it being full of seats, which is typical of Kenyan homes. The seats come in handy because someone is always entertaining visitors who come in large numbers. The Kenyan families are large too, and a family could have ten or twelve kids. My dad had seven with my mom and two with my step mom. John's step dad has six from his two marriages and two step children.

We sat on one of the sofas and John's dad sat on the one opposite us. My mother-in-law went to the kitchen to check on the food.

“How was your trip?” He asked.

“We had a good trip,” John said. His dad had retired from the government and he was doing farming business. He occasionally visited the U.S. when invited by non-governmental organizations for a conference on elections. As we sat there, we talked about the U.S. and sometimes about Kenya and how infrastructure had improved. Dinner was ready. Nzomo, the houseboy, together with Mary, the house girl, had prepared chicken, okra, spinach, chapati, and fruits among other delicacies.

“I grow these vegetables out there at the green house,” my mother-in-law said with a radiant face as she took me to the dining table to see the vegetables.

““Oh, that is great! So you eat fresh vegetables daily, right?” I said.

“Yes, Nzomo harvests enough for a meal every day,” she said.

“In America we are used to frozen foods, but I appreciate them because they are easy to cook. You know there, not many people have house help like here,” I said.

“Even with the house help, I still cook because you cannot leave all the work upon them, but I understand the lifestyle in America. You know I went to college in Atlanta.”

“Yes, I know. You had mentioned that you studied in Atlanta, Georgia.”

“Yes, I “ We heard a car park at the driveway, and in a few minutes, three kids ran into the house grinning.

“Uncle Katende, I am so happy to see you!” The oldest one said calling John by his middle name.

“I am happy to see you too,” John said as he greeted each one of them. Meet Naomi, my wife,” he said.

“Hi Aunty Naomi, I am Kitili,” the oldest one said as he extended his hand to me.

“Hi Kitili,” I’m glad to meet you, how old are you,” I said as I shook his hand.

“I am ten,” he said.

“How about you?” I turned to the girl behind Kitili.

“I am Katheu, and I am eight years old. We will sing a song for you,”

“I am happy to see you Katheu. What’s the name of the song?”

“It’s called, It’s called, ...” She said one song and Kitili said another.

“You can sing both songs. We will be glad to hear them.” They were happy that both choices could be accommodated.

“How about you young man? What is your name?” I reached out to the youngest one who was standing at Katheu’s side.

“I am Katende,” he said. He was my husband’s name sake.

“How old are you?”

“I am five.”

“Are you going to sing for us too?”

“Aunty, the three of us are going to sing together,” Katheu chimed in.

My sister-in-law and her husband walked in. Once they had greeted everyone my mother-in-law announced that it was time for dinner.

After dinner, the kids entertained us with songs and dance and they told us stories about their school and their friends. They also wanted to hear stories about America, and John was ready with answers to all their questions. I was impressed at how good he was with kids, given that we did not have one of our own. It was school day the following day, so Kethi and her family could not stay for long. We were also tired and we excused ourselves too and went to the guest house.

Family Expectations-Hurdles to Overcome: December 2009

In the African culture, a woman is expected to have a child soon after marriage, and if a considerable amount of time passed without one, people started talking.

“Ucio mutumia ni tatha,” (“That woman is barren,”) they would say.

Others would come up with more interesting reasons purporting to know the woman better,

“She aborted several times before she got married, that is why she does not have kids.”

And the stories would get juicier. In Africa, the whole value of a marriage is pegged on children; that is why in the olden days, our grandfathers would marry three to four wives and have as many as forty children.

Some of my relatives did not wait for the day I would visit Kenya to ask some of those questions. Occasionally, I would get a call from an aunt and she would want to know if I have any “news.” I would automatically know what she was asking, and I would say,

“No, we are still trusting God for children.”

“Have you seen a doctor?” the aunt would ask.

“Yes I have,” I would answer without giving the details she was seeking.

I dreaded calling some of my relatives because of their boldness in infringing on my affairs. One Saturday morning, John and I were sitting in the living room at our house in Edmond. It had been long since I had talked to my aunt in Kenya, so I told John,

“I’ll call aunty to say hi,”

“Sawa, tell her I said hi,” John said.

After we had talked briefly with my aunty, she said,

“I wanted to ask you something in private. Are you alone?”

“I am here with John, but I can go to another room,” I left John in the living room and went to the bedroom, and shut the door behind me; the cell phone still on my ear. From his look, I could tell that John was wondering what was going on and why I had to move away from him

to talk on the phone. But he is not confrontational, so he just kept quiet until he got an explanation from me later.

“I am alone now. What did you want to say?” I asked.

“I was praying with some women friends and I requested them to pray for you. After prayers, they asked me to find out from you if you have ever aborted a child, because probably that is the reason you are having miscarriages.”

I wanted to tell her that I got pregnant for the first time in my life in 2004; about two years after John and I got married, but I spared her the details and I simply said, “No.” I was surprised that my aunt asked me this question, but at the same time, I was glad that she had asked, and I had had a chance to tell her the truth, for it dawned on me that that was the misconception in some people’s minds. I was glad too that she was praying for me, because I knew there is power in prayer.

We were going to Kenya and we would come across those bold women, but we were prayed up in preparation for it. During our prayer, John had specifically prayed that we would not be questioned or bothered about our situation by our family or relatives. My mother-in-law was very concerned that we did not have children, but she did not bug me about it. I could not have known how to turn down her offer for me to visit a doctor in Kenya, because she is not the kind of woman I could just tell “No, ma’am, I have already seen specialist in America, there is no need to see a doctor in Kenya.” Having been a headmistress of a high school, she talks authoritatively, and her suggestions sound like commands. She can be very controlling, given the opportunity. She expects her children to agree with her on every decision. When John disagrees with her, she will sulk a while, and she will not answer his calls. I am glad that she never

approached me directly, but my sister-in-law asked me about it and I told her we had seen specialists and there was no need to see a doctor in Kenya.

Neither my mother-in-law nor any of my aunts brought up the topic during our two weeks visit to Kenya that December; instead, some errant question came from a man--a distant relative, when we visited my brother in Moi's Bridge. I had invited my mother-in-law to travel with us to meet my family. During our visit to Moi's Bridge, John, my mother-in-law, the driver and I, had just arrived and we went round greeting family and friends who had come to meet us. Several elderly men were seated on chairs under a tree cutting up goat meat and others grilling the meat. One of the men had several questions for me.

"What is the name of your husband?" He asked.

"John," I said.

"John who?" he asked without smiling.

"John Ngoka," I said.

"John Ngoka who," I realized that he wanted me to confirm whose son my husband was.

"John Ngoka Kivuitu," I said.

"How many children do you have?"

"We don't have any."

I felt bad that he had asked me about children and yet he knew that we did not have any. I wanted to run away so badly to avoid the grilling. Luckily, an uncle came and interrupted our conversation, and I excused myself and joined my cousins who were seated under the tent waiting for the occasion to begin, which was being held in our honor. I was so angry at that man, because I know he knew the answers to those questions, but it probably gave him pleasure to humiliate me for not having children.

Prayers from John's Grandparents: December 2009

My mother-in-law had wanted us to meet John's aging grandparents. "I want you two to receive their blessings," she had told John, but every year we had planned to travel to Kenya, some hindrance had cropped up and we cancelled our plans. John's paternal grandmother was sick and she lived on the compound. We were taken to her room but she could not talk or move. The following day we left in the morning and drove to Wamunyu in Machakos to meet John's maternal grandparents. Keith, John's brother in-law, gave us his Toyota and a driver to take us to Wamunyu. I sat at the back with my mother-in-law. Once we left the city, the driver started moving at one hundred and sixty kilometers (about one hundred miles) per hour and sometimes higher. Although the road was paved, the place was hilly and the road was meandering. Very few cars travelled on that road because it is in the county side, and probably it got a littler busier on weekends when people from Nairobi travelled up-country to visit their relatives. Looking through the window, I could see the green lush grass down in the valley below, waking up to face the hot day ahead, as the dew covering it gradually disappeared in the air. There were no side barriers on the road and I was concerned at the speed we were moving because a small mistake could easily send us sprawling down into the valley. Unfortunately, there were no road signs to show the speed limit, or rather I did not spot any road signs. John asked the driver to slow down and my mother-in-law did the same. He slowed down for a few minutes and when we got busy talking, he would speed up again, then he would be reminded to slow down. That went on like that until we reached a section of the road that was under construction where he had no choice but to slow down.

"I see the road to the village is now being paved," John said.

“No, this is now worse than what it was before they started the work. The contract to build this road was given to a local company and they dug up the road and left it this way,” my mother-in-law said.

“What was the reason for leaving it incomplete?” John asked.

“They said that they ran out of money, and yet the government had paid them,” she said.

“Can’t the government force them to complete the job?” John asked.

“You know how corruption is here in Kenya. This place is not like there in America,”

“Oh, yeah! Maybe one day things will change,” John said with a resigned tone.

We stopped at the village shopping center to do some shopping.

“Is this where you grew up?” I asked.

“Yes, I grew up here and my dad taught at that primary school over there,” My mother-in-law said as she pointed to a small village school around the corner.

“So you got the teaching thing from him, eh,” I smiled at her.

“Yes, I did. I was a teacher all my career life,” she said.

There were a few grocery shops at the center where we bought some groceries to take with us. My mother-in-law took us to a craft factory where they made carved animals. I was so excited because I had never seen such a factory. I only used to see the finished products at the tourist market. The Kamba tribe where John comes from is the expert in woodwork. We took the stairs that cascaded down to the basement. There we found a lot of men sitting on the floor with their tools of trade. Some had saws with which they cut the wood, while others had sharp special knives with which they shaped the animal from the wood. They had both electrical and manual tools. Another group of men was sanding the semi-finished products. The ladies sat in their area and they painted the carved animals. Some animals like the lion were painted with black polish

while others like the cheetah were dotted with brown spots. The floor was covered with pieces of broken carvings and sanding paper. You could see a black head of a lion here and a dotted leg of a giraffe there. John and I skipped over them as we toured the factory. Then we went to the sales desk where we bought several carvings to take back to America.

We got onto the road leading to the grandparents' house. The road was in the middle of a maize farm. The tall maize stalks dwarfed the car. The grass on the road was tall and green except on the two thin lines where the grass had been flattened by vehicle tires over time. After about twenty minutes' drive, we arrived. The house came into view just as we reached the end of the maize farm. I saw the beautiful compound with green grass and beautiful trees in the front yard, which I was told belonged to John's uncle. The self-contained brick house stood at one end of the compound and the outside kitchen at the other end. The outside kitchen was made of mud and thatched roof. Both houses backed into a mango farm. The air smelled of grilled meat and I could see smoke coming from somewhere near the kitchen. My hunger increased instantly. I imagined sitting down and tackling a piece of goat ribs with ugali and spinach. It was going to be delicious. John and I occasionally grilled goat in Oklahoma but I imagined that this one cooked in Kenya and eaten with grandparents was going to be very delicious and special. I confirmed that a goat had been slaughtered after seeing the skin and other internal waste that lay on the grass between the two houses, where two men were preparing nyama choma. John's grandparents lived just a few meters away from there. We parked the car under one of the trees. Uncle's car was parked under another tree. The two houses on the compound were at a lower elevation from the yard where the grass ended. Immediately in front of the houses was a clean swept patio where the grandparents together with John's uncle and other relatives sat waiting for our arrival. Several kids, mostly toddlers, were running around causing the dust to rise up from

the unpaved patio. The sun was hot and flies moved freely from where the goat meat was being grilled.

The younger people stood up to greet us, and John and I bent to greet his grandparents. Both grandpa and grandma were lean. I would estimate 130 pounds for Grandpa and 115 pounds for Grandma. Grandma was about five feet tall or slightly less, and shorter than Grandpa. I could tell where my mother-in-law got her height from. In their company was another younger looking lady, probably in her mid-sixties, who was introduced as Grandpa's second wife. Grandma was about 80 and Grandpa about 90. I was so fascinated to meet John's relatives, and since I love to take pictures, I immediately started arranging everyone for a photo session.

"John, please sit next to Grandma. Okay, now you guys smile," (my mother-in-law interpreted for grandma).

They all followed my instructions and I took a lot of pictures on two cameras that we brought with us. John took pictures of me with his relatives as well. We all sat outside in a circle where food was served. Everyone spoke in Kamba except me. From time to time, John interpreted for me.

"They are very happy that we have come all the way from America to see them," John said.

"I am happy we were able to make the trip this time. We planned for a while, and we thank God that it finally worked," I said, and John reported back. Grandpa could speak Swahili so he occasionally spoke to me directly. Grandpa was dressed in a suite while Grandma wore a long dress and a sweater on top. She had a cell phone hanging on her neck for easy access.

"Can Grandma operate a cell phone?" I asked.

"Yes, she knows how to call and answer calls," my mother-in-law said.

“Oh, my goodness! There is surely great progress here now. When I left Kenya, there were hardly any cell phones around. Now even a grandma has one; it’s amazing.”

“Yes, my sister’s daughter bought it for her and one for Mzee (the old man) as well. Now we are able to reach them easily,” my mother-in-law said.

As I expected, nyama choma was served in plenty. A tray full of the goat meat was put in the middle of our circle on a coffee table. Spinach, rice, stew were among the foods served. All of us except our grandparents served our own food. The grandparents, who sat the whole time, with their walking sticks on the ground besides their chairs, were served by my mother-in-law. When I sat down to eat, I was faced with two dilemmas; first, the flies in the air wanted to feast on our food, so I occasionally used my hand to chase them away. No one else appeared to be bothered by the flies. If John was, he did not show it. My mother-in-law simply flagged them away and she continued to eat. Second, I wanted to put my plate on the side table and free my hands so that I could hold a piece of rib with both hands to pull the juicy meat with my teeth. I could still have held the rib with one hand and managed to get the meat off of it because the meat was soft enough, but in order to fully enjoy eating goat meat, I needed to use both hands. The moment I put the plate on the table, the flies thought I had set up the food for them and they came together with their children and grandchildren to feast. I could hardly put food in my mouth without first chasing away flies, and so I asked John if I could sit inside the house, my mother-in-law overheard us and she said it was okay. John and I sat in the house and we finished our food peacefully. We went back outside when we were done. It was time to give gift.

“Grandpa and Grandma, we decided to make this our first stop before going to visit other places, because we wanted to see you after such a long time, and we have brought here a small give for each one of you,” John Said.

“Thank you very much,” they both said as they each received the cash from John.

“Tell your wife that she is very welcome here,” Grandpa said. John translated to me.

“Move closer here together with your wife. We want to pray for you.” Grandpa said.

John and I moved our chairs in front of them. They held our hands and prayed in Kamba, and then Grandma spit on her chest and spoke blessings over us. John did not interpret all that, but I understood it to be prayer and I did not need interpretation. When I later asked John what they prayed for, he told me that they prayed for us to have kids. After that John’s grandparents were taken back to their home while John, John’s uncle, my mother-in-law and I, took a tour of uncle’s land and saw where he grew mangos to sell before leaving for Nairobi. That was the last time we saw our grandparents. John’s paternal grandma who was sick at the house died in January, about a month after we got back to the U.S. and his maternal grandma died a few months after that. She was diagnosed with cancer, but it was too late to treat it since it had spread. My father-in-law was also diagnosed with throat cancer and he received treatment in India, in Britain and in Kenya and although he was declared cancer free, he later succumbed to a heart condition. Grandpa also died soon after that, and in a span of four years, we had lost all four of them. We were truly thankful to God that we were able to see all of them before it was too late.

Visit to Boiman: Recounting the Election Clashes of 2008: December 2009

We also visited my family in Eldoret, Moi’s Bridge and Boiman before our two weeks visit was over. I asked my siblings to come with us to Boiman, my dad’s maternal home. We arrived in Boiman around five in the evening. I had warned John that the place was usually very cold, but I had underestimated how cold it was. I forgot to forewarn my mother-in-law and when

we arrived, I rummaged through my clothes to find warm sweaters and socks. I gave John his, and one of mine I gave to my mother-in-law, and I wore the other and I covered myself with a warm shawl on top. We all wore socks to keep our feet warm. My siblings who had accompanied us were well prepared since they visit Boiman on several occasions. We came through the front entrance where there was a road leading to the main road and we parked the cars on the lawn just in front of Uncle Alex's house. A few things had changed since the last time I was there. It was the time when I visited my Cucu just before I went to America. My Cucu's house had been demolished, and so was my dad's house. They were old houses and I am sure they had the potential to become a health hazard if left uninhabited. They were made of mud. Uncle Alex had built a new house just several meters from where his old one stood. His son used the old house. Both houses were made of wood. The walls were overlaid with cardboard on the inside to keep them warm, and corrugated iron sheets on the roofs.

My uncle, my aunty, my cousins together with other relatives and neighbors were there to meet us. We hugged and shook hands as I introduced John and my mother-in-law to my family. The compound had changed and so had the people. There were no vegetables that used to grow at the back of the house anymore. There were no cows and goats that used to graze on the pen near the farm, and there was no food granary on the compound any more. The maize was replaced with trees on the farm. The place looked and felt dry. Kids had grown. I could hardly recognize them. We spent the evening chatting in my uncle's living room. We were served with grilled goat meat, chapatti, and mukimo (a mixture of potatoes, corn, peas mashed together). A tray full of goat meat was passed around and we picked a rib, a chunky meat or a meaty bone and feasted on it before going for another piece. My family likes to talk and so the house was awash

with stories. We spoke in Swahili for everyone to understand. My mother-in-law who sat next to Mary also had a lot to contribute. John sat next to Dan enjoying the food.

A neighbor gave a speech appealing to us (their relatives and neighbors) who have been graced by God to live in the U.S., the land of plenty, to remember them who were still there in Kenya and help pay their children's fees and build them better houses. No one responded to his appeal because the fact was that Kenyans in the diaspora do help their families, relatives and neighbors where there is genuine need.

Dan told us about the clashes during the 2008 presidential election.

"That was one election that divided the people of Kenya along tribal lines like never before," he said.

"How could people who we have lived with all our lives turn against us just because an overzealous presidential candidate incited them to do so?" I asked.

"That was beyond comprehension. We have lived with Kalenjins as good neighbors all our lives, but when Mr. Kivuitu announced that President Kibaki had won the election, the Kalenjins did not want a Kikuyu to take that seat, so they attacked their Kikuyu neighbors," he said.

"Your own neighbors were the ones attacking you?"

"Not really, what they did, they swapped places with Kalenjins from other neighborhoods, such that we would be attacked by people we had never seen before and our neighbors went to attack people they had never seen before."

"How did they know who to attack?" John asked.

"We woke up one Saturday morning and noticed that all the houses belonging to our Kalenjin neighbors had a gourd at the door, and the owners were not present. We sensed that

something was brewing, especially because the political sentiments against the Kikuyus had polluted the air during the election period,” Dan said.

“Then what did you guys do?” I asked.

“We Kikuyus in the neighborhood took the gourd and placed them on our doors. We did not leave any gourd on any house belonging to a Kalenjin. We made sure all our houses had a gourd. Then we kept vigil. At night, people we could not recognize came and stormed into the houses without gourd and they destroyed everything inside, and that was the beginning of the clashes.”

“Did your neighbors come back?” someone asked.

“Yes, but we decided not to spend the night in our houses any more before it was no longer safe there.”

I remember spending sleepless nights praying for my family. John and I had followed the presidential results as they progressed. We watched it live over the internet and since Kenya is nine hours ahead of U.S. we had to stay up late to get the latest news. John’s stepfather was the Chairman of Electoral Commission Kenya (ECK), and he was in charge of announcing the election results. The incumbent, Mr. Mwai Kibaki, is from the Kikuyu tribe, while the then opposition leaders from the Orange Democratic Movement were Mr. Raila Odinga who is a Luo from Kisumu and Mr. William Ruto who is a Kalenjin from Eldoret. The first Kenyan President, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, was from the Kikuyu tribe. The second president, Mr. Daniel Arap Moi, was from the Kalenjin tribe. Mr. Mwai Kibaki was the third president of Kenya.

Kenya uses the majoritarian system of election and the candidate with the majority votes wins the election. The politicians have worked hard to divide the nation along tribal lines, therefore, each tribe votes their own candidate and if a tribe is not fielding a candidate, then a

leader from a different tribe will appeal to the unrepresented tribes to vote for him or her. Since the Kikuyu are the largest tribe in Kenya, it has been easy for candidates from the tribe to win national elections. Presidential elections in Kenya have always been marred by violence. It was reported that during the 2008 presidential elections, Mr. Raila Odinga, the main opposition party candidate together with his deputy Mr. William Ruto, collaborated with other smaller tribes to reject a Kikuyu candidate. It is said that they spread anti-Kikuyu sentiments throughout the county prior to the elections. It was not surprising therefore, that chaos erupted immediately following the ECK's announcement of Mwai Kibaki as the winner of 2008 elections.

As John and I watched the change of events on the news when chaos erupted in various parts of Kenya, we immediately started receiving phone calls, and text messages from our families informing us about the same. All of John's family was safe because they lived in Nairobi, and his dad had government security, but all my siblings who were in Kenya at the time were in the opposition strongholds. Mary was in Kisumu and Dan, Phyllis, Fanco's family, Joe and Jane were all in the Eldoret area. In addition, I had relatives, like my aunt and cousins there, too.

We knew that a lot of people had taken refuge in the local churches and my family and relatives were in churches, too. The rich and the poor were all huddled in the churches or the police station looking for refuge. It was almost impossible to get out of the towns by road because the non-Kikuyus barricaded the roads leading to other towns with very huge stones and bon fires. They also way-laid public transport systems like buses and matatus and asked all the passengers to get out and identify themselves. They looked at the ID's and if someone had a Kikuyu name, they were slashed to death with machetes. They could also tell a Kikuyu by their physical features and by their accent, too. The opposition leaders claimed that the Kikuyu's had

spread into other regions belonging to other tribes and acquired properties and they felt that the Kikuyus were denying the local tribes a chance to advance themselves. They burned houses and businesses belonging to Kikuyus and forcefully ejected them from their land.

The president had sent the army to quell the clashes, but the opposition kept fueling their tribes. We watched in utter disbelief as a church burned to the ground. Men were trying to rescue women and children as the rescuers caught fire themselves. The Kalenjin arsonists had poured fuel and lit fire on the church, burning hundreds of people who had taken refuge there. We quickly called our families in Eldoret to find out if any of them was in that church, and thankfully, although still sad for those who were burned, none of our relatives was there. John and I went to church that Sunday morning and requested prayers for our families.

I was at the verge of losing a big chunk of my family to that chaos. Our families and relatives called and pleaded with us to find a way to save them. There was no way to send help to them, and they could not even receive money because the banks were closed. John and I did the only thing we knew to do, and that was to pray. We prayed and fasted for their safety. We pleaded with God daily to save them. We reminded God that the Bible says He is a sure help in time of trouble. I could hardly work because I was either on the phone with my dad asking me if I had heard any more news, or I was on the phone with one of my siblings either here or in Kenya exchanging news of the status of the other family members.

“How did you manage to keep the children and everyone with you together?” John asked.

“It was just by the grace of God. When the whole Rift Valley, Nyanza, and Western provinces erupted into chaos; it was hard to get food, airtime with Safaricom or Airtel cell phone

providers or even a place to sleep. We moved from the church to the police station and I requested a police officer friend of mine to let us use his house”

“How long did you stay at the police station?” Mary asked.

“We stayed there for one night. A lot of people spent the night standing on their feet because the place was so crowded. I had talked to a friend of mine who is a police officer and he allowed us to stay in his house which was just a room and a kitchen. We could not fit on the bed so some sat on the floor, others on the only couch in the room and some of the kids slept on his bed.”

Hospital staff was overwhelmed by the amount of work because they did not have enough staff to take care of the patients. Some patients walking in with cuts from machetes could not be attended and most people died from excessive bleeding. Mary told us how they managed to escape from Kisumu.

“My family and I had to charter a flight to Nairobi when our home in Kisumu was attacked by the Luos. I had already felt unsafe that evening and I had gone to a friend’s house in a different estate where we thought it would be safe. My daughters were out of town, but my husband and my son decided to stay at the house. The Luos attacked our house that evening. By God’s grace, Solomon managed to escape through the window. He went over the fence into our neighbor’s compound. Thankfully, our neighbor, one of the few who still had a human heart, hid him in his house. My son Moses could not escape in time, so he went to the bathroom and hid behind the shower curtain,” Mary said.

“That is scary. Did they go to the bathroom? my mother-in-law asked.

“Yes, we used to keep some shoes in a closet next to the bathroom, and so when the men went to get the shoes, some of them stood inside the bathroom. Moses held his breath so that

they could not hear him, but he says that they were so close to him they almost rubbed against him since the bathroom was small,” Mary said.

“How did he get out of there?” My uncle asked.

“The attackers took all the things they could carry, mainly clothes, shoes, the TV, Video players, and other electronics. Then they broke into pieces the items they could not carry, like the entertainment unit, before they left. Our neighbor, who is actually a Kelenjin, had gone to our gate to try and convince them to leave but they only left after they were done stealing and destroying items. He said it was a crowd of about thirty people. Once he was sure that all had left, he walked carefully into the house which was very dark as the electricity had been tampered with. He used a flash light and looked for my son everywhere. Then he started calling out his name, and when Moses recognized our neighbor’s voice, he came out of his hiding and they both went to his house. Solomon called me and told me all that had happened and we decided to find a way out of Kisumu. He contacted his sister in Nairobi and my sister-in-law sent a plane to come pick us up. Early the following day, at around three in the morning, our neighbor smuggled us out and dropped us at the airport in Kisumu and once there, we were safe. The plane arrived at five in the morning and we took with us some friends who had made it there that early,” Mary said.

“I know Kisumu was very chaotic, too. The Luos there burned your trucks, right?” Dan said.

“Yes, they burned our business vehicles and our personal cars, but thankfully, they did not burn our house,” Mary said.

“It was the same with us. We had to evacuate the children and women from Eldoret because every day we stayed there, danger closed in on us. We could hardly walk freely on the

streets, and food was becoming scarce. We called the District Commissioner and requested him to provide us with an escort to the airport. At three the following morning, we went and waited outside the DC's residence and the police showed up in two Land Rovers. We were in three cars, but there were many other people who had come too. One police car went in front of us and one behind us. All the personal cars were lined up in the middle. Each police car had tons of police officers standing at the back with their guns cocked. The Army was all over town but it was still hard to keep everyone safe. Since half of the country was in chaos, the law enforcement was stretched thin," Dan said.

"The police had to stop at various spots to remove the barriers that had been placed on the roads by the Kalenjins. We found huge stones placed on the roads and we were all in prayers throughout the journey, especially when we had to stop and wait for the police to roll away the stones," Dan Said.

"I remember I was on the phone with you guys the whole time until you got to the airport. I prayed and petitioned God on every development. I could call you, call Mary, Jane, Joe, Dan, aunty and Franco's wife. All of you were facing different challenges. I could not physically help but I knew to use the only weapon I had and that was prayer. I am grateful to God that He came through for us," I said.

"Yes He did. We made it to the airport safely and there were several planes that had come to pick people, but the number of people was more than the planes could carry. Some people had stayed at the airport for three days, waiting to board an airplane. Our cousin Derek decided to book one direct from Nairobi. He made calls and gave them the number of people with us. After about two hours, the plane came and all the women and children left. Once everyone was in,

Derek, myself, and the other guys went back to town, where we tried to survive until the chaos was over,” Dan said.

Joe told us how he had to move his wife, his daughter and their youngest son to a friend’s house in Kitale while he and the two older boys stayed with him at Moi’s Bridge to keep vigil.

The chaos ended after thousands of people had been killed, and several thousand more displaced, houses torched and businesses burned and President Mwai Kibaki remained in power. However, Orange Democratic Movement leaders pushed for a coalition government. After several months of negotiations chaired by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, President Kibaki agreed to a coalition government. Raila Odinga was appointed to a non-executive prime ministerial post. Mr. William Ruto was appointed to head the powerful ministry of Agriculture.

The constitution had been amended to allow a coalition government for only one term, which ended in 2013. By then, loyalties had changed and Mr. William Ruto had teamed up with a Kikuyu, Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, and decamped from Mr. Odinga’s party. Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto won the elections and formed the government in 2013. Just like the previous election, the main opposition party, led by Raila Odinga, cried foul and demanded that the elections be nullified, but this time, the constituents were not willing to take arms against their neighbors any more since they too suffered a great loss during the chaos in 2008.

We were very grateful to God that He saved the lives of all our family and relatives, and even though some of them lost property, that is replaceable.

After eating the goat meat and all the other foods, we were served with hot tea. The charcoal in the three jikos was constantly replenished as it burned out. The boys from the village wanted to hear about America, and so I told them about the snow, about the winter and summer

seasons which they don't experience in Kenya, and about the roads which are more sophisticated in American than they are in Kenya. They were fascinated to hear that and everyone wanted to sit there and chat. We slept a little past midnight. The neighbors and other relatives went back to their homes and all the guests were accommodated by my uncle. We went back to Nairobi the following day. We spent the rest of the time visiting relatives in Nairobi and its environs and shopping. I shopped for clothes, while John shopped for watches, which are less expensive there.

The Seventh Pregnancy: December 2009

On the day of our departure to the U.S., I woke up early in the morning to pray. Before I sat down in the living room, I first proceeded to the bathroom to take a pregnancy test. It was positive. "Oh my God, I believe that I will carry this pregnancy to full term," I started to pray. "I know my God you have broken the spirit of premature death from my womb. Lord you said from this day on, you will bless me." I started reminding God of His promises. Then I awoke John and I told him that I was pregnant. "How do you know?" He asked in a sleepy voice. I told him about the test. "Can we pray?" I asked. "Yes, yes, we need to pray," he said as he pushed off the covers. He rubbed his eyes and sat up on the bed. We held hands and he put the other hand on my stomach and prayed;

"Father God we thank you for this pregnancy. We pray that Naomi will carry this pregnancy to full term. We break the spirit of premature death and we speak life to us and the child. We pray for a smooth pregnancy in Jesus name. Amen."

John went back to sleep and I went to the living room to continue with my prayers. I opened the Bible in the book of Haggai 2:18b & 19b which says "...give careful thought to the

day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought. From this day on I will bless you." This is the word of God that I was holding on to. This was His promise that He was going to bless us. After I had had six miscarriages, I seriously sought God to know the course and God had revealed the cause to me in a dream, and after I had sought Him further, He showed me what my family and I needed to do to break the curse. Once we followed His direction, He had given me this scripture, which I held onto as the confirmation that He had broken the curse. I could not wait for morning to share the news with my sisters. John preferred to keep the news under wrap for a while, so we did not tell my mother-in-law immediately. I felt in my spirit that this pregnancy was going to be successful. For the first time, I had a confidence in me and a knowing in my heart that all would be well. It was the seventh pregnancy.

Part Six: Back to America, expectant.

The Baby Taking Over my Body: 2010

Our flight landed in Oklahoma at night. It was such a relief to be back home, and such a joy to be expecting a baby. All my fears had vanished. I scheduled a doctor's visit as soon as I could, and it felt like a whole new beginning. John and I went to the first doctor's visit and as we drove, I asked John,

"What shall we name our baby?"

"Josiah," he said.

"Josiah. That's a good name. It's unique. How did you come up with that?"

“I have been praying about it, and the other day I was reading the Bible in 2 Kings 23, and the spirit of God impressed on me that our son will be a reformer. King Josiah is one of the kings who brought reformation in Israel.”

“What if it is a girl?”

“Well, that’s the name that the spirit of God gave me, so we’ll wait and see.”

From that time, we called our baby Josiah, and in a few weeks, the ultra sound confirmed that it was a boy.

The pregnancy was not particularly rosy because I threw up the whole nine months, and I felt like the baby had taken over my body. Even though I used to think nausea was a good indicator that the baby was growing, I had had too much of it. I had a craving for one type of food one week and a different craving the following week. At some point I only ate beef and nothing else, and even that beef had to be cooked with very little oil and without spices. It tasted boiled. John could not eat it, so we cooked two different meals. At times I felt hot when it was freezing and John and I had to sleep in different rooms. I shut the vents to stop the heat. Close to the time of the delivery, my leg muscles cramped from time to time. I would be walking and I would suddenly feel a cramp on my thigh that made me moan and grunt, bending forward. I would try to reach the wall, a table or anything close by to support myself. My actions scared John and my colleagues at work many times because they thought I was in labor. I did not feel like I had enough energy left to overcome this problems through prayer, but I knew that John was holding me up in prayer.

I had enrolled for two classes for the spring semester, but I had to cancel them. I stopped going to school altogether because I could not manage school, work and a pregnancy that made me nauseous all the time.

One day I dreamed that John and I were cycling up a mountain and I was ahead of him. I got so tired close to the top, and felt like I did not have enough energy left to get me to the top, but John was cycling right behind protecting me from rolling back. He encouraged me saying, “Keep going, don’t give up, we are almost there.” When I woke up, I understood that the dream meant that John was holding me up in prayer. Even though men don’t experience the physical changes and strain of carrying a baby in their belly, I knew that John was carrying the emotional burden with me. He cooked for me when I could not cook and he offered to lift me up from bed in the middle of the night when I needed to go to the bathroom and my stomach delayed me.

The baby appeared to have “taken over” John’s body too because he packed on the pounds and gained some sympathy weight. At some point, we could not tell the difference in size between my stomach and his.

Part Seven: After Six, At Forty.

August 2010.

We checked in at Mercy Hospital, Oklahoma City in the evening as the doctor had instructed us earlier that afternoon. The day John and I had waited for, for seven years, had finally arrived. My stomach was bulging, and I could hardly see the floor in front of me. John felt the need to support me as usual, so he extended his left arm and I slid mine around his. The nurse ushered us into a large private room with a bed close to the window; a sleeper sofa at the corner and a bathroom off to one side.

“This is your delivery room; make yourselves comfortable; I’ll be right back to take your pulse,” the nurse said.

“Thank you.” I said and proceeded to sit on the bed while John sat on the sofa, which was

going to transition into his bed later.

“Can you believe this is happening?” I asked John.

“Yes, and I am so glad the delivery was scheduled,” he said.

“Why? Were you worried that I would give birth along the highway on my way to work?”

He laughed. “No, that’s the worst case scenario. I was worried that you would go into labor at night and I wouldn’t know what to do.”

“Ha ha, that’s funny. Is that why you wore that worried look every time my legs cramped?”

“Yeah bwana! I could not tell whether you were in labor or not.”

John looked happy and peaceful now that we were finally at the hospital. There was something calming about being at this point even amidst all the emotional excitement. It was the first time in months that John had let his guard down.

“Now that we are just about to have a baby, how do you feel?” I asked.

“I feel great joy. I am looking forward to the moment he will come out crying,” he said.

“When I used to have the miscarriages, did you think that one day we would have a child?”

“I had hope with each pregnancy that it was going to work, but I felt discouraged when the bleeding would start.”

“I could not tell what was going on in your mind because you never expressed your feelings or emotions,” I said.

“By nature, I pray about something for a day or two and then I don’t dwell on it again. It’s not like I dwell on it to the point where people go into depression because they cannot let go. I leave it in the hands of God and move on,” he said.

“With me it is different; the issue bothered me almost every day. Even when I was not consciously thinking about it, it was somewhere at the back of my mind,” I said

“I could tell that for you, the emotional turmoil did not end in just one day. Whenever we talked about children, it was like a raw wound, but I handle things differently,” he said.

“You know I had all the relatives asking me from time to time whether our situation had changed. So I had to deal with those questions as well, and they caused stress at times.”

“My family and I don’t talk a lot. Our conversation is very brief, and we don’t connect on that emotional level, so none of them really inquired much from me.”

The nurse returned with a cart full of medical equipment. She took my pulse, my blood pressure, got the drip and the Pitocin going, and we were all set. The joy in my heart could not have been explained in words. I just wanted a minute to myself to tell God how great He was.

I was full of excitement and anxiety at the same time. Excitement because the long waited day had arrived, and I would hold our baby in my hands, and anxiety because I did not know what to expect about the process of pushing and birthing. John was pleasantly surprised when Dr. Goff invited him to deliver the baby.

“What am I supposed to do,” he asked in shock.

“Wear these gloves and sit on this chair and I will instruct you on what to do,” the doctor said.

“How about the (video) camera?”

“Give it to the nurse.”

“Okay, this is how you operate it,” John told the nurse and he happily slid the gloves in his hands and sat on the doctor’s chair. The doctor pulled another chair and sat next to him.

“You will put your hands here when the baby’s head appears, but don’t worry, I am here with you.”

After a few minutes of pushing, the baby slid into John’s hands assisted by the doctor. As Josiah let out his first cry, I smiled and thanked God for the great miracle He had given us. He surely is able to move mountains. He had told me to be still and know that He is God, and on that day, I testified that He truly is God.