

# Still I Rise

*Maya Angelou*

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.  
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.



## Pachoto Journal 2013

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I am my sisters keeper



# Every Woman

*has a story to tell...*

Woman: Sacred! Powerful!

It is in the swing of my hips  
The parting of my lips, the curve of my breasts  
The silky softness of my legs  
It is in the huskiness of my voice  
In the batting of my eyelids  
In the movement of my arms

It is in the subtlety of my scent  
The punctuation of my walk  
It is the shaking, twisting turning  
In the gyrating and mourns of pleasure  
It is in the brightness of my smile  
The ripeness of my full lips

They call me names, all these labels to describe my freedom, hure, slut, whore, loose  
My ability to choose my own lovers,  
My ability to decide where, when, why, and with whom I find pleasure  
My presence at a bar, my walking down the street after dark.  
My skirt that is not long enough to trip me over,  
My African hair growing wild and untamed is not womanly enough, not dignified enough.

Hanzi zvinongodawo kuti unzi mai nhingi mufunge (They say 'iiii, it's just better to be a 'MRS'- even if he beats you to death- at least you die with your dignity intact- it will say MRS so & so on your Tombstone!'. Mai nhingi vekuita sei, that is your choice and you are free to live it. Handikushore ini, saka iwe unondishorerei.

...I hear them as I walk down the street, whispering of how I was raped by my father, how I am a victim of date rape as a teenager; Yes I was, so what? You want me to curl up and die, sink into the earth and never come out. I cannot let what those bastards did to me end my life.

I AM sacred and powerful

This is a celebration of the gorgeous creation that I am

I am woman, uninhibited woman

Freed from the chains and slavery of public opinion

I am woman and you cannot deny it.

It ooooozes from the s-w-i-n-g of MY hips.....

... the parting of my lips

...the very scent of me

I AM woman,

Sacred. Powerful.

...and if you cannot take it, that's too bad for you...



# V-Warriors Journals 2013

## The power of story-telling

'There is a gift I receive in all of the Katswe spaces, it is a great reminder why I do the work I do with the women's movements in Africa & the world. It is an invaluable gift. So, thank you.'

Shereen Essof'

This journal is a collection of women's stories, a unique gift to the women and girls of Zimbabwe- because her experience is told 'in her own words'. We are grateful for the Sista-hood we have found in JASS, and many other organizations across the globe- which continue to ignite our passion working towards women's growth and well-being. Many friends of Katswe, and specifically JASS, have encouraged us to document our voices, and stories. There is a great saying that 'the faintest ink is better than the sharpest memory'.

When Katswe Sista-hood ventured into the adventure and journey of documenting women's stories, we began to deeply appreciate the power of voice, a power in allowing raw truth and experience to spill past the protective walls that we all construct for ourselves. Only after these walls have been breached, and our stories echo out beyond our control, can we begin to understand that power, which can serve as catalyst for action, change, and revolutions.

## Where did the stories come from?

Every woman has a story to tell: The stories in this collection were edited by Katswe but narrated by the young women from diverse backgrounds and who are part of the Katswe-Pachoto community. Most of the stories were then packaged for a stage performance; the V-Monologues- our theatre and arts platform for awareness raising and advocacy. It is Katswe's hope that the stories will touch a heart and help transform, inspire and ignite sparks of hope, resilience and tenacity to break the norm and transmute women's lives.

The process of collecting stories was one of pain, joy, laughter, tears, support, silence and above all healing. Realising the emotions that story telling entails, the process was backed up by the Heart, Mind Body (HMB) concept. HMB is a strategy that prioritises the well-being of individuals as essential for nurturing stronger organisations and catalysing movements for real, sustained change. Ensuring that the strategy itself defends women's bodies, the agendas reflect and channel women's passions, values and anger (heart) and tap into their minds through wise political choices shaped by a careful evaluation of power, interests and information.

## About Katswe

The organization was founded in 2007 as a loose network of dynamic young women concerned about young women's lack of access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services. Finding themselves trapped in another war surrounding their bodies at a time when economic struggles had gripped the entire nation, this group of young women recognized the second battle young women had to fight where their bodies were a currency for survival and also an intense source of violence. Katswe is "rooted in a feminist analysis and women's lived realities, Katswe creates safe spaces for learning, sharing and consciousness-raising that catalyse women's collective power to act."

## Katswe Vision

"A world where women have the power, skills and agency to effect meaningful change."

## Katswe's Identity

"Driven by fierce commitment Katswe places the politics of women's bodies at the heart of organising. Transcending differences and working with marginalised women, Katswe uses the transformative power of SAFE spaces to explode "sacred cows", challenge taboo issues and build a sista-hood to liberate all women."







# Wars on our bodies

## Why? Salome's\* Story:

I was young, ten years old to be precise, but I could see life slipping away from my mother. On her bed is where she remained as sisters and aunts nursed her. I thought I would be afraid, afraid of seeing death pulling her slowly, but I was not. I sat by her bed day after day till the day I looked at her and she looked away. I thought I had imagined it, but she could not look me in the eye. Like a child who has been caught stealing and cannot stand to look at their mother. I had heard before that when one is seriously ill and they refuse to meet your gaze, then the ancestors will be calling them. I concluded that my mother's end was near. "Salome, my daughter, I need to tell you something." I could see fear on her face as she said this. I begged her to tell me



she could not. For days I thought of nothing else. What was my mother so afraid to tell me? Finally she called me again, in a whisper she told me how my late grandmother, her mother had visited her dreams instructing her to tell me the truth. With her face turned away she narrated the story of how she went to find a few twigs to light the fire leaving me playing in the yard. "A few minutes later I returned to find you bathed and asleep." Babamunini (my father's younger brother), a deeply patriarchal man that does not believe men should care for children had bathed me? I was taken aback. How had he bathed and put a two year old to bed. When you awoke I realised you could not walk. I took you to Gogo Rutsanana who explained that you had been violated. I could not bear it. I told your grandmother and other family members

\* Not her real name

Our lives are about fighting, fighting for recognition as complete human beings, fighting to get an identity document, fighting to ensure that our children go to school, fighting to put food on the table, fighting off the violations from relatives, friends, partners- and sometimes the police (who attack instead of protect). Fighting, fighting, endless fighting.

Every step, breath, & stride I make is a fight, a fight that is mine to win, for I am a warrior; Nubian warrior.  
(Winnet Shamuyarira)



who all insisted that the matter be dealt with in the family. I was angry but I did not have the courage to stand up to them, not until the day I walked in and found your Babamunini making another attempt to rape you. As soon as he saw me he ran. That is the day I packed all my belongings and left the village. I left everything and took you with me. How I wish I had been stronger, ensured that that father\* of yours was sent to prison. He took away from you mwanangu (my child) and I will never forgive myself. Please forgive me so the ancestors can grant me passage and accept me into the heavens." I watched my mother's tears pour out of her eyes. She never looked at me again till she died a few days later. I was filled with a rage I cannot explain. A rage that started from the pit of my stomach. How had my entire family allowed this man to get away with such a thing. I got on a bus and headed to the village where I found my father. I told him I had little time and needed to speak to him urgently. I looked him square in the face and asked him. 'Ichokwadi here kuti ndiri mwana mudiki makandibata chibharo?' (Is it true that when I was young you raped me?) Blood drained from his face, he instantly looked 20 years older, He tried to mumble something and he stuttered. Eventually he fell to his knees and wept. I stared at him unmoved. To date I still struggle with this knowledge. Knowing that a father, the one who was supposed to protect me is the same man who violated me. He violated me, but I am the one who carries the shame. The shame of being raped. How do I tell my husband that my own father raped me? How do I make him understand that my father robbed me of my womanhood?

To date, I feel everyone who looks at me knows what happened to me. Being able to tell you this story has been the start to a journey of healing and self-acceptance. I am ready to tell my story to others, to allow other sisters who may have gone through similar experiences to know that they are not alone. I want the world to know that I am a survivor not a victim. I am a woman of many strengths and will not allow my father (Babamunini who raped me) to take that away from me.

\* In Shona culture, a brother to your father is considered a father to you.

## When you dare to be different

### Princess\*\* Story:

**I**t is a very cold winter evening. I can feel my toes turn to ice even though they are in the comfort of boots and socks. As usual, I am standing at the corner of Fourth Street and Josiah Chinamano, hoping to attract the attention of a well-paying customer. I am feeling lucky tonight 'pamwe ndichabata mhene inondipawo pakuru pekuti ndikwanise kubhadhara fees yevana vangu' (maybe I will be able to get a client who will pay me well enough to go and pay off my children's fees). These thoughts help me contain the cold. I pull out a cigarette and start smoking. In that instance, a Range Rover comes and stops right in front of me. In my heart I just say thank you to my ancestors for hearing my plea, a Range Rover... he should be able to pay well. 'Hey babes, how much is your short time\*\*\*?'; he asked from the open window of his car. '\$30' was my prompt response. He asked me to get into his car so that we could go to his place. He told me that \$30 was too little; he would instead give me \$100. 'Babie, you look too juicy, I will give you \$100 and you can help relieve the stress I am under and fulfill my fantasies.' I was ecstatic. I had already started doing the math in my head, I could pay my children's outstanding fees and still have a bit more to spare. I thought after him, I would go home, there was no need to continue braving the cold.

We got to his apartment, a well-furnished duplex flat in one of the affluent streets in town. The brother did not want to waste any time, he led me to the bedroom which was upstairs. That is when my nightmare started. As soon as we got into the bedroom, a monster replaced the man I had driven with, chatted to and made small talk with in the car. A monster with blood-shot red eyes stood in front of me holding a gun. I froze. I had been in the sex work industry

\*\* Not her real name

\*\*\* Short time is street lingo used in the sex worker trade to determine the period that one will spend with a sex worker. It ranges between 5 -30 minutes. It is also sometimes referred to as one round.



for more than 20 years and this was my first time to see a client with a gun. I had been through other forms of violence and torture but had never envisaged a point when I would have to have sex at gun point. With the gun hanging over my head, he made me eat his penis; twice he came in my mouth. I went through the motions in a daze. The man asked me to keep going, he kept telling me that he wanted to make sure that I felt pain and I would go back to the street to tell other 'whores' that sex work was not an option. I tried to plead with him, told him my HIV status and about my young children at home, he was not moved. He then told me to lie on my back, roughly pulled my legs apart, inserted his manhood into my vagina without protection and raped me. I could not understand his hatred. He then took out a knife and asked me to bend on my knees. He took out a knife which he forced into my anal opening, he said he needed to make way for his penis. He tore through the tissue in my anus, by this time I was numb to pain, my ancestors had deserted me. He raped me, again, and again- till I passed out.

When I regained my consciousness, he was lying on the floor, in his vomit- a bottles of hot stuff thrown all over.

This was my chance- to finally escape this nightmare. I tried to move- but the pain was excruciating. I have never known such pain. I cursed everyone; my father, my mother, my relatives, if

they had tried to pay for my fees, maybe, just maybe I would not be in this predicament. I am thankful that I survived to tell this story, survived only physically for emotionally I am scarred. I carry scars from that night and many other nights, scars from rape by the police, the people who are meant to protect us. Scars from being made to feel less than a human being; of being reduced to less than a dog. I am ostracized by my community, I am made to feel as if I deserve all the pain, the hurt. I have heard many people say: 'How can a sex worker be raped? Is that not what they want anyway?' I cannot access justice fully even in instances where I have been violated for fear of being criminalised.

Even though the man who made me go through torture and raped me was arrested and convicted to 15 years in jail, I have not known justice. I live in my own jail, even if he stays in prison for the rest of his life, my own scars, pain and hurt, will keep me captive. I live with the pain, pain that has been inflicted on me merely because I am woman. A woman who has decided to use her vagina to pay her bills and send her children to school. The work I do is criminalised and looked down upon because I am a threat to a system that says women's bodies are not their own. Tell me, is this body too isn't my own to control and utilize for my survival, then what on this earth will ever be regarded as my own?



## To what end? Tinashe's\* Story.

I was brought up to value my virginity. I was constantly reminded that I had to be pure for my husband. That way, my marriage will be guaranteed of happiness and respect. "No man appreciates used goods" my mother would constantly tell me. At 15, I started dating Simba. Simba was my first boyfriend and we truly loved each other. He was my first kiss but I refused to go all the way. Like the good girl that my mother had taught me to be, I decided I would keep my virginity for my marriage bed. Four years into the relationship, Simba told me he could not take it anymore. He had been

\* Not her real name

pushing me for sex but I had told him that I had to wait for marriage. I remember the day Simba told me that it was over. I felt the world slipping from under my feet. Simba had become my world and I could not imagine living without him. I vividly remember the day like it was yesterday.

"I think you need to grow up first then you and I can get back together. When you are grown I will be waiting for you."

I read and re-read the text. I could barely make sense of it. I knew this had nothing to do with my age. It had everything to do with the fact that for four years I had insisted I would only have sex after we were married. I could hear my sister's words, 'ukaona mukomana anorambira musikana kuti aramba kurara naye chibva wazi-va kuti haamude.' (If a guy leaves you because you have refused to sleep with him, just know that he never loved you) It was a little hard for

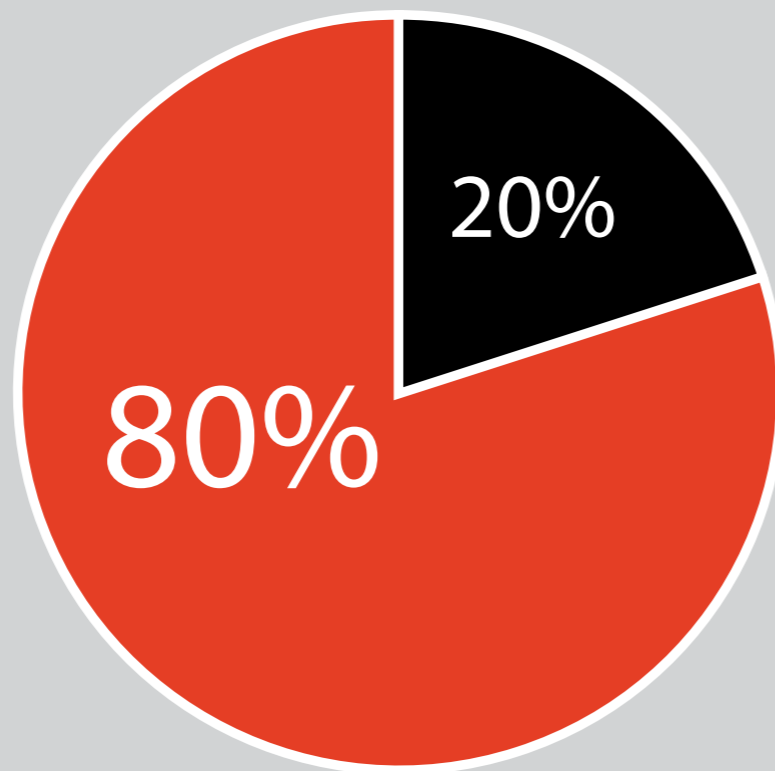
me to believe that Simba didn't love me but I also trusted my sister. She was the pride and joy of my parents. All my mother's words of wisdom started with 'Hona sisi vako mai Panashe, haudi kuchatawo zvinodadisa kudaro, kuita imba yako.....' (look at your sister Panashe, do you not want to do us proud by getting married like her) So I decided I was not going to beg Simba or compromise.

I needed to find someone who could fill the void that had been left by Simba.

A short while later I began dating Kelvin. A month into the relationship he asked me to walk him to a friend's house. At his friend's house we found a woman that insisted I get into the house. A little while later the woman excused herself to go and buy airtime. She left me and Kelvin alone in the house. Kelvin started touching me and I asked him to stop. He grabbed me pinning my arms and legs. He RAPED me. I can still feel his weight on top of me, his smell as he tore away at my womanhood. My precious and priceless womanhood! How do I explain to the man who will marry me, that he forced himself on me, that I am good woman when the proof of my goodness is gone? I am still with Kelvin, but my heart is with Simba. I still remember how Kelvin forced himself on me. That day is still deeply entrenched on my mind. I keep asking myself what the fuss about my virginity had been all about. I had kept it, treasured it, hoping that I would share it with someone I loved, someone who would put equal value to it. Why do I have to put a value on my virginity? I lost it to a man I hardly knew, a man who forced himself on me, a man I am with currently only because he broke my virginity. At times I wish I could turn back the hands of time, slept with Simba instead of keeping my hymen intact, only to be violated and robbed by a man I hardly knew.



In Zimbabwe, 1 in 5 girls first sexual experience was against their will.







# When love does not conform.....

“I am grateful for spaces such as Katswe, GALZ and Kasipiti. Spaces that allow for lesbian women to open up and talk about issues that affect them without fear of judgment.”

## Perfectly normal

### Mel's\* Story

I was the first grandchild on both my families sides. It is a big deal as they are a lot of expectations that come with being the oldest. So it was not a great surprise that my family found it hard to accept the fact that I love women. They found it hard to see me grow into a muscular woman, not the full breasted and full hipped young woman they had hoped for. One that would attract the attention of many young men and hopefully add to the family herd with her bride price.

As I was growing up, I liked to hang out with the boys, riding bicycles, climbing trees and dressing in jeans and trousers as opposed to lacy dresses. I was a typical “tomboy”. I became aware of my love for women when I was thir-

teen. I loved to play with the boys but I never felt anything for them. I always melted when speaking to the girls. I would get Goosebumps all over my body whenever I got a hug, a friendly pat on the back from a female friend.

As the years went by, my family became fully aware of my sexuality but it was only spoken about in whispers. It was a subject that no one ever wanted to bring up. I however would constantly be questioned about my boyfriend. Often my aunts would tease me about the need to see the man who would bring the much anticipated bride price for me.

“Ko achauya tomuonawo riinhiko Babamunini wedu. Hausi kuona kuti uri kutokura here nhai Mel?” (So when will your boyfriend come so that we also get to meet with him. Can't you see that you are aging by the day.)

Things came to a head in 2012. I had just turned 23 and staying with one of my aunts, my father's younger sister. I got home to find my aunt on the floor with a bottle of tablets by her side. We managed to take her to hospital in time for a suction to be done and minimize any harm

that the tablets may have had on her. On being questioned why she had attempted to commit suicide, my aunt declared that she feared hell's fire as she was living with sin. I was the sin that had nearly led to my aunt's death. I knew then that I had to move out and go and live on my own.

I am now living in my own space but I still do not know peace. My family still does not talk about my sexuality and my love for women. I

know they are ashamed of me.

They have been to spiritual and traditional healers to try and exorcise the demon that possesses me. The daughter and grandchild whose birth they celebrated, whom they thought would act as an example to all others but has turned out to be demon possessed. I am grateful that my immediate family is at peace with my sexuality and I can at least be myself around them I think I would be able to deal with the pressures, stigma and “shame” of my sexuality if my extended family could also accept me

for who I am. I made to feel ashamed for loving the people I have feelings for.

The society that I live in has not made it any better. I have been asked by many whether I am a man or a woman. It is as if I chose to have the body that I have. I am asked how women have sex, I am reminded that only men can give women pleasure. I am constantly reminded of how patriarchal and homophobic our society is. I yearn for the day that people are able to openly embrace and accept each other regardless of race, class, sexual orientation, etc. I am grateful for spaces such as Katswe, GALZ and Kasipiti. Spaces that allow for lesbian women to open up and talk about issues that affect them without fear of judgment. Just sitting and talking to you about my life story, without you looking at me with judgmental or pitiful eye is such a relief. I just wish more people would understand that you do not choose to love women just as heterosexuals do not choose to be heterosexual.

\* Not her real name

# When me is all I have...

"I know for sure that my journey to healing has started and I hope my story will help other women out there who may be in similar situations to realise that they are not alone. I also want them to see the value in themselves."



## In the wilderness Nancy's\* Story:

**M**y father died when I was young. I grew up in a family where there was a mother and a father. We were two children only. Me and my little brother, Tendai. My father and mother gave us unconditional love. When I was 12 years old my father fell sick. We were devastated when he was passed away, to leave me, my mother & Tendai on our own. We only found comfort in knowing that he was now at peace and that we had each other. I remember however at my father's burial when only my brother was called to go and stand at the head of the coffin as is tradition, for the children of the deceased to pay their last respects. I was confused as to why only my brother was called but I dismissed it thinking it was because he was a boy and I did not bother to follow it up. I know for sure that my journey to healing has started and I hope my story will help other women out there who may be in similar situations to realise that they are not alone. I also want them to see the value in themselves. Three months after my father's death, my 5 year old brother passed away too leaving my mother and I alone. During his funeral, there was a lot of talk and family meetings which I did not understand. However, the facts surrounding my parentage became a reality to me soon after Tendai's burial. My father's relative came to take everything from my mother claiming that she had no claim over any of the property that was in our home because the only child that their brother had with them was now late. That is the day I discovered that the man I had called father for 12 years was not my biological father. I was devastated. My whole world came shattering on my feet. For 12 years I had lived a lie. I suddenly realised that I did not know who I am, my totem, where I come from, who my relatives are, it dawned on me that I was alone. I begged my mother to tell me about my father, but she said he had wanted nothing to do with the pregnancy. I had no birth certificate and my mother kept promising to find one of my 'relatives' to assist. A promise that she never man-

\* Not her real name

aged to fulfill. In no time, my mother also fell sick and then she passed away. I was 13 years old. Suddenly I was alone, no one was left in my life, my mother, the father that I grew up knowing and my only sibling Tendai were all gone. At the funeral, one of my mother's relatives offered to stay with me, little did I know that it was not out of the goodness of her heart and need to look after me that drove her into making the offer. In me she had identified a perfect and cheap nanny and housekeeper. Even when there was electricity, I was asked to cook outside on the open fire, wash soot covered pots and pans. I was a slave in this household. She refused to send me to school. I was only good enough for the work and looking after her one year old daughter. Every day, I would prepare for her children to go to school, my heart bled and I often cried. I wished my mum had at least given me a clue as to whom and where I could find my father. Then maybe I could find love and siblings. After four years of staying with my 'evil' aunt, she sent me packing because her daughter, whom I had looked after since she was one, was now going to school. I had served my purpose in her life. I struggled to make my own life, finding ways to survive. Hunting for relatives! I ended up getting married at 17 but my heart is still bleeding. My heart bleeds because no one cared about my well-being even those people whom my mother helped to go to school. No one cared to think whether I had underwear, sanitary wear or even something to eat. Now that I am married, my mother's relatives are demanding bride price from my husband. The same people who did not care about my welfare after my mother passed away are the ones in the forefront to ask for my bride price. Others look for me when they are in need of financial assistance but whenever I have problems, I know no one will give my issues an ear. There is a guy who has approached me saying he is my father's sister's son. He tells me that I look like my father and he wants us to meet. He constantly brings me messages that come from my father. I am too hurt to even think of seeing this man. A man who has been absent from my life for 21 years. I have nothing to say to him. Does he have no shame? "Are you looking for me only because I now have my own life, a husband and a child?" I have already resolved



## When me is all I have...

in my heart that the only family that I have is my husband and my children. : 'If [my father] didn't care enough to be there then why do I think that finding him is going to do anything? The people around me are my family now... so why do I keep searching for this shadow?'

## Mother and father in one - Tariro's\* Story:

**B**eing on your own can be traumatic. It can push you to limits. I married very young as a way of escaping loneliness. We were born 5 in my family but all my siblings died in mysterious circumstances. They would be found murdered or they would just mysteriously die after a very short illness.

I got married at 15. This was my own way of escaping loneliness. I am the only surviving child in my family. I do not have a relationship with my relatives because there was a lot of talk relating to how my family members died. Just before one of my sisters' died, she warned us against going to my uncle's house (my father's older brother) because he was the one responsible for the mysterious deaths in my family. Then she died. I now only had my cousin Sibongile. Sibongile disregarded the advice from my late sister and she went ahead to visit my uncle. Two days later, she was found murdered close to my uncle's house. The only confidante I had left. I had to find a way of moving on with my life. That is how I found myself married at 15. I thought that I at least had found someone who could help me feel at ease and whom I could share my thoughts, my joys and my tribulations with. He was handsome and I thought he was kind.

When I got married, my mother in law and one of my husband's sisters did not like me. They gave me grief as we were staying with them. I gave birth to a bouncing baby boy. I thought the fact that I had given birth to a baby boy would pacify my in laws but the curses and shouting did not stop. It got worse to a point

where I decided to leave. My baby was 18 months when I left my husband to start life on my own.

I was alone yet again. However, my son gave me reason to look at life differently. I have now found my feet; my son is thirteen years old now. My child's father has never looked after his son. I have single handedly raised him but at times it hurts me. I do not want my son to grow up without the support of a family like I did. I want him to know his family so it hurts me when they do not lift a finger to help look after him nor make an effort to come and see him. After all he carries their totem and the blood that runs in their veins is theirs. I sometimes meet my mother in law, but I am filled with so much hatred and anger inside me because of the way she treated me when I was with her son.

I am proud though that I have managed to look after my son this far. He is going to school and he is a source of joy in my life.

I am now with another man, who sees me as his queen. He cannot do without me. I remember one day during this story telling process I got home late because I had to pass through Pizza inn to get some pizza for my family. He did not believe that I was late because of the pizza and he ended up coming to the Katswe offices the next day to see what exactly I would be up to. He came for the showcasing of the vagina monologues show and was very proud of me. I am equally proud of myself. I know that I will have days that I will cry, but I also know that there is a silver lining. I may not have immediate family but I have found a community of friends and family in the young women I shared this story telling journey with. We all bared our all and in the process we built some solidarity.



## Crossing the line...

# Celebrating Womanhood

\* Not her real name



## Nubian Warrior

### Tracy's\* story:

I am a true reflection of how determination and hard work can make a person. I married at 16 years old and my husband was staying with his sister and his father's sister. When I eloped, my husband's relatives were refusing for me to get married to him as they said they were not sure it was their brother's pregnancy. We slept in the cold on the first night and we were instructed to go to Parirenyatwa Hospital for a scan to confirm how many months pregnant I was. When the scan confirmed what their brother had told them, they then accepted me into their home.

Once they were sure that the pregnancy I was carrying was their brother and nephew's my aunts asked me not to do any work. They wanted me to wake up, bath and eat. I found this had to fathom and it tortured me. I had been brought up not expecting others to work for me so I defied the order. One day I took out my husband's laundry and started washing it. My husband's sister then took all the laundry that was in the house and came to give it to me. There are 13 people who live at the house and I was expected to do laundry for all of them from that day.

I was once accused of trying to kill tete. Someone went to consult a mupostori and put some water and tete's name in the water. It was not me but when the bottle was discovered I am the one who was accused of trying to kill tete. The pressures that were coming from husband's family led to me have a spontaneous abortion at 3 months. I was traumatised and devastated by my loss. They all wanted me to leave because I was no longer pregnant but my husband stood by my side.

It was after my miscarriage that I decided that I needed to do something that would nourish my mind as an individual. I started attending Katswe pachoto meetings and through interactions with other women, I became a stronger person. Now I can speak out at injustices. When I am not happy I have learnt to be able to tell

\* Not her real name



tete or my husband. I now have a daughter who is 3 years old. I am instilling values of self-care and self-awareness in my daughter. I want her to grow up with a sense of self value and know that she has to put her well-being at the fore of everything that she does. I have learnt to do the same for myself and it is the one gift I have decided to give to my daughter.

## Daring to fly

### Mia's\* story:

My room of solace, my bedroom became my most dreaded space. The man I called my husband had turned our bedroom into a hell hole. I had been married to this man for five years and when he started beating me up, I would always find an excuse as to why it was happening. Little did I know that this was only the beginning of worse things to come. By the time we were in our third year of marriage, things were only getting worse. At times he would not come back home,

\* Not her real name

these are the times that I would at least be free, free from his fists and hurtful words. I remember when he started to bring different women home. Bringing them into our matrimonial bed. He would sometimes ask me to sleep on the floor and at times he would ask us to sleep in the same bed. I was forced to watch as he had sex with the different women whom he would bring. Forced to hear all the moans and groans and he would go on to insult me. I tried to go back to my parents but because they had accepted his bride price, they always asked me to go back. I had very limited choices because my parents would not accept for me to come back home. But one day I decided that I had seen and swallowed enough and needed to move on with my life. I packed my things and left. I knew life was not going to be easy but I decided that I needed to take charge of my life. Today ten years later, I am living in a rented space, but I am my own person. I am paying fees for my children through money that I get through sex work. I needed to take charge of my life and I did. Now my children are happier because they are living in a more peaceful environment. I celebrate my life and what I have been able to do by myself.





# Reflections

on the

## Story telling process



### A vagina warrior's reflection:

#### Conversation with Primrose Kavhumbura

The process of gathering stories entailed using the HMB strategy and also different information gathering tools. As part of the process of this story telling, Katswe managed to use some of the stories that were shared by young women for the v-monologues. In the ensuing interview, Winnet Shamuyarira (W.S) took time to talk to Primrose Kavhumbura one of the v-warriors who took part in the story telling process.

**W.S:** How did it feel when you were selected to be part of this story telling journey?

**P.K:** I found it refreshing because I was not a performer at all. I never thought I could act. I remember Rudo and Rumbi coming to Dzivarasekwa for the selection process and then being told I had made it. I did not believe I could actually do it and did not even understand what it entailed. I just knew I had found something that would help me make other people understand issues that were going on in other young women's lives.

**W.S:** What were your expectations?

**P.K:** I really did not have any expectations, I just thought wow, I have found something to do and also something that can divert my attention from the stress that I normally encounter whilst at home.

**W.S:** First day can you recall how you felt, how about as the process unfolded?

**P.K:** I remember being asked to reflect on who I was and tell my story using the tree as an illustration of my life's journey. When I was asked to tell my story, I found it hard. I remember crying. Then Rudo asked us to go home and write our stories. That was the most traumatic part of the journey! I had to confront all the devils that I had neatly packed away. My husband saw me write my story and wanted to read it, when he read the story, he cried, he was touched. He noted that he had never really known how deeply the issues that had happened in my life had affected me until that moment. The process kind of strengthened my relationship with my husband as he now also understood how I felt. I found the writing as a pressure release. I managed to let out the things that were affecting me and realised that I had let out some tension.

**W.S:** Any aha moments?

**P.K:** The aha moment for me during the storytelling sessions was the fact that we had a counsellor and a counseling room. I knew if I wanted to cry and needed tissue or time to myself, then I could just escape into the counseling room. I also liked the group sessions we did with the counsellor as they helped me to start looking at things differently. I was very opinionated when it came to issues of LBT women but the counselling sessions that focused on stigma and discrimination helped me appreciate some group members and their issues. I started appreciating that we are all women and our stories may be different but there is a common thread that brought us together. I also learnt a lot about communication skills during the group counselling and above all the issue of self care was of paramount importance.

**W.S:** Did you cry, laugh, sulk, (during the story telling process)etc and why?

**P.K:** I cried a lot, reliving my life story was quiet hectic and the crying eased the tension. Hearing the other ladies share their own stories sometimes made me cry as well and at times it made me stronger. It made me realise that as women, we all have different stories to tell and the strength with which we carry our stories gave me hope. I also laughed a lot because we became comrades as sisters. We always found a moment to laugh, especially during the dance sessions. And this was very refreshing. Well what I found most gruesome was the exercise. Having to run during the rehearsal for fitness purposes. Rumbi always gave us a hard time, having to repeat things over and over again, sometimes it became frustrating but in the end it did pay off. I now understand why sporting & exercises were a necessary evil- out of me emerged an resilient & energetic dancer, and this is a confidence booster- just knowing I'm good at something!

**W.S:** The V-Monologues day itself tell us what you remember most?

**P.K:** On the day of the V- Monologues, God worked on that day. When I was rehearsing I was taking it simple. During the rehearsals I just thought the main stage was going to be a walk in the park. I was even able to separate myself from my story. On the V-Monologues day, I found myself looking at the darkness whilst on stage. I could not see the people who were in the auditorium but I knew they were there. As I started telling my story, I owned it, I felt all the emotions that I felt when going through the experiences that I was narrating. It was the real me on stage. I was really overwhelmed by the emotions and the experience was real for me. If ever there was a time I can say I let go, it is at the time that I performed my monologue at 7 arts.

**W.S:** Then comment on what the whole process meant for you?

**P.K:** I am grateful I found it therapeutic. I got an opportunity to learn through my own life experience. I found the story telling important. Dance and music during the story telling process, was really good, dances were able to give different messages to people which were relevant to the different monologues. I loved the whole process as it was not just about the monologues but it gave me an opportunity to do some self-introspection and re-evaluate my priorities and needs as a young woman who is also a mother, sister, aunt, community advisor, etc.

**W.S:** How are you feeling now? Where are you now?

**P.K:** I feel good and ready to conquer the world. I feel good about the fact that my story can be used by other people as a point of strength. After the performance at the 7 Arts, there are people who cried in front of me, there are people who could relate to the story. I just feel that there is need for Katswe to go to different places with the monologues because they are a powerful tool, that allow for women's voices to be heard.



# The Story telling journey: Where am I now?- V-Warrior

I have been holding on to the pain, hurt, anger and frustrations of my life. I often cry on my own but this journey of telling my story has been therapeutic. I remember the first day when we were asked to do the tree exercise by Rudo, trying to remember all those aspects that make me, I was shaken. I found myself reliving my story. I had never realised just how much hurt I was carrying with me, until that day.

Putting my story on paper helped me pour my heart out. I also appreciated that we had a counsellor who helped us process our thoughts, and I have begun on a healing path. She's held my hand through the pain; not by imposing answers and solutions but allowing me to look inside myself and find my own answers.

I know for sure that my journey to healing has started and I hope my story will help other women out there who may be in similar situations to realise that they are not alone. I also want them to see the value in themselves.

'I told my story. I cried. Then I regained my strength. Then went on stage and did a monologue in Shona and English. I never thought I could speak English and my uncles who were in the crowd told me I had done a splendid job. This was a real confidence booster for me and continuously telling my story is helping me heal.



## Rudo Chigudu: Co-Director of the v-monologues

The process leading to the monologues was characterized by a lot of crying and laughing. The story telling process was also very hectic with some stories too heavy to handle. I appreciate though that we had put in place mechanisms to deal with the heavy issues such as the dance routines, debrief sessions, one on one sessions with a counsellor, breathing and karate sessions as well as drumming. The exercises that the girls went through were for fitness as well as for tension release.

There's an act of defiance in going onstage and telling your own story, because everything about our stories is private... When young women get married they're told, 'Don't air your dirty laundry in public,' [yet] the woman next door knows you've been beaten because you ran down the street half naked. But you're still supposed to pretend that it's [violence] this very private thing and you're supposed to contain it. There's something in saying, I'm sick and tired of pretending, that my life is private when there's nothing private about it and the privacy is actually killing me. This private space is where I'm violated most and I can't be silent about that anymore.

## Winnet Shamuyarira – Information and Communications Officer

'I found the storytelling process profound. I remember at one time sitting in the session and not knowing what to do with myself. The young women trusted the space enough to open up and share their life stories. I really found that humbling. To be able to open up to total strangers and tell your story is something that is not easy so I really admire the girls ability to do this. We had lots of tissue in the office because there were a lot of tears. I found the storytelling therapeutic for myself as well. The power of voice was demonstrated during these processes and I believe these voices will transform the lives of many women.'

## Talent Jumo: Coordinator & Founding Member- Katswe Sistahood

I just have a lot of respect for the women who have had the courage to stand up, open up, and share their experiences Pachoto; those who make it into the V-Monologues warriors teams

and those who don't- all are special and need to be acknowledged as the warriors who make up and sustain our movements. We are reclaiming the power of our bodies and voices in Katswe, as an entry point for our movement building agenda. The women that share their story give us light- the light that builds our awareness into women's lived realities. They give us insurmountable strength; when we suffer from burn out and hopelessness- our courage and determination is reignited by those stories- because by telling their story- women would have demonstrated their courage- and those stories are the very ammunition we need to confront the powers that be, demand justice, and accountability from duty bearers.

## Eunice Kapandura–Process Counsellor

"The story-telling process and build up to the monologues show was a rather a thought provoking process for all the girls who participated. You could see how much women are burdened generally in life and how much they were dying to share and just tell their story.

You could see a person from the time we started, during the process, right through to the end that they were really transforming; that they were taking off a heavy burden off their life. For me it was a learning curve because it was like a group counselling of open minded interactions of the girls. We managed to speak the same language, we managed to give each other space to be individuals within a bigger space. The whole process I found as a stimuli for building movement.

The issues that each woman brought into the space is like a reflection of the issues that are happening to maybe 1 in 10 women in Zimbabwe. We managed to realise that together we can break the glass ceilings through communications and self –expressions.

We managed to equip each other with life basic support systems to manage our physical, emotional, spiritual beings. The whole programme had a Heart, Mind and Body approach so sometimes we would just be singing, sometimes we would be building the body stamina, we would be trying to activate the mind to be active as well as the body and we engaged the emotional, physical, spiritual side of the whole presentation or story that would be told in a very interesting manner."



## What our audiences have said...

For Katswe to put on a global stage, issues that many are uncomfortable talking about is huge! As a young gay man, I saw myself in there; the many battles, violations I have experienced, I could share the emotion- It is difficult to be invisible in your own land. I hope someone out there saw/heard your/our plea. We are human too.  
Tatenda,  
7 Arts Theatre, Harare  
8th November 2013

I found the performance very powerful. Seeing the young women on stage, narrating their own stories and truths moved something in me.  
Lillian M  
7 Arts Theatre, Harare  
8th November 2013

It was amazing to see ordinary take to the stage and narrate their stories. It made me believe that we all have something to give and we are all capable. These are ordinary women we go to pachoto meetings with and never knew they could actually go on stage and put up such a profound performance.  
Rebecca, Glen Norah  
7 Arts Theatre, Harare  
8th November 2013

The way the young women trusted us with their truth and lived realities was touching. I have often been told that storytelling is a therapeutic process that allows for healing and seeing those young women bare their souls on stage, made me believe it more. The stories they put across made me start thinking critically about how we always judge, more so because of lack of appreciation of one's lived reality.  
Beauty, Marondera

For me the performance itself is just the icing on the cake. What I deeply appreciated was the journey itself- how it unfolded, and enabled me to revisit my sub-consciousness, to find the source of my pain, and begin on a healing path. This for me... is priceless.  
(V-Warrior)







# The V- Monologues

## In the Wilderness...

### Mel's Monologue: Unlean

After 23hours of labour...Beads of sweat formed and dried on my mother's face. 'Femera mudenga sembwa; Aiwa chirara neleft. Push, push!!!...they urged her to let the little life within her womb out into the world. 'Push, push, puuuush'... and there I emerged... Fists clenched holding on tightly to my gifts. Skin peeling as I was long overdue. Perhaps it is because I knew of what I was being born into. They gathered and ululated in celebration: 'ulululu makorokoto!!!'; 'aiwa ndeedu', 'aiwa makorokoto chaiwo'. ...I was the first grandchild from both my mother and my father's families. They dotted on me. 'Wapihwa shamwari Keresenzia, wapihwa shamwari.' Bundled up, I was held close, suckling on my mother's breasts as she received me into

this world. Born in the land of my ancestors, both in the land of joy and togetherness. My grandmother called for her precious herbs, root vegetables and goat meat then chewed them up and spat the juices into my mouth. 'Welcome to the earth,' she whispered!!! That was 23years ago, before my existence had brought a bitter taste into their mouths, before their pride and joy had been turned into a bitter hatred. Long before they saw me as a curse to the family. As I had grown and not developed the wide curvy hips and full breasts they had anticipated. As I had refused to wear their lacy dresses that ripped every time I climbed a tree, as I grew and found greater pleasure in the company of boys, riding bikes and make believe cars. As they noticed how my hard exterior melted into soft shyness whilst in the company of the girl from down the street. I fell out of favour but all remained silent about their discomfort. Till my aunt with whom I was living at the time unsuccessfully attempted suicide and when questioned about her reasons declared that she feared hell's fire as she was living sin.

A sin she named as Mel, I was her sin. My love for women and not men was the sin she could not live with. How do I tell them that I am the same girl whose birth they celebrated? How do I make them understand that who I love does not make me any less their child, grandchild or niece? It is me, Mimi the one you thanked your ancestors for. I cannot change who I love in the same way you cannot change who you love. This land is mine too; you cannot exile me from my motherland. You revolted when you were abused for the colour of your skin, you revolted when you were abused because your sex, you revolted when they abused you because of your HIV status yet you cannot see how all you hypocrites are abusing me because of who I love. I cannot change who I am so take me as I am or have nothing at all.

### Take me as I am...

In a jungle of opinions and judgment...In the wilderness...I have lived, tossed in every direction by any and every wind that comes.

**Kuchamhembe, kumabvazuva, kumaodza nyemba, kumavirira.**  
(North, East, West South)

Zuva richibuda, at the very first break of dawn. As my life began so did your judgments. Squeezing milk on my little vagina to suppress libido in later life, hanzi ndisazoshereketa kana ndakura. Then you proceeded with your instructions ekudhonza 'pulling the labia', hanzi mwana asazoorwa ruri ruware. Then years of monitoring my every movement. Musikana kwaye haadaro.....



## Love, lies, truth, texts, coercion: my world up-side-down... in-a-heartbeat!

Nyamavhuvhu!!! Mhepo yakavhuvhuta ichibva kuchamhembe yakananga kumaodzanyemba. The wind carried me that evening from our little home down the street hand in hand with Kelvin. I hardly knew him. He was my rebound boyfriend, and I was desperate to forget about Simba. Simba who four years earlier had swept me off my feet. We used to argue about which route to take on our way to the shops to buy the vegetables or tomatoes my mother had sent me for. Vanotaura vakaguma vaneta kutaura vachingoona tiri tese. Noone could understand how he made my heart skip a beat, how I missed him as soon as we said goodbye. 'I don't think zviri kuita. This relationship is simply not working out! I think you need to grow up first then you and I can get back together. When you are grown I will be waiting for you.' I read and re-read the text. I could barely make sense of it. I knew this had nothing to do with my age. It had everything to do with the fact that for four years I had insisted I would only have sex after we were married. I could hear my sister's words, 'ukaona mukomana anorambira musikana kuti aramba kurara naye chibva waziva kuti haamude.' It was a little hard for me to believe that Simba didn't love me but I also trusted my sister, after all she was the pride and joy of my parents. All my mother's words of wisdom started with 'Hona sisi vako mai Panashe, hau-di kuchatawo zvinodadisa kudaro, kuita imba yako.....' So I decided I was not going to beg Simba or compromise. A short while later I began dating Kelvin, a month into the relationship he asked me to walk him to a friend's house. That is the day the wind blew, kuvhuvhuta kubva kuchamhembe ichienda kumaodza nyemba. At his friend's house we found a woman that insisted I get into the house. A little while later she said she was going out to buy airtime. Before I knew it, no one else was in the house except for Kelvin and myself. He began touching me and I asked him to stop. Please Kelvin, usadaro, handisi kuzvida. He grabbed me pinning my arms and legs. That is the day the wind blew, kuvhuvhuta kubva

kuchamhembe ichienda kumabva zuva. With it that day it took a part of me. 'Who would believe me? Who would understand?' So I did what is expected of all good girls. I told Kelvin I could no longer go home. That is how I became his wife. Yet the very site of him makes my skin crawl. His touch takes me back to that day, that 29th of August. I cannot explain the pain or betrayal. Yet Simba, my dearest Simba remains the one I long for. Get me out of the dark; let me find love, true love!!!

## Letters from my departed mother: found in my mind's eye...

Ivhu ndiro rakandimedza  
Asi newe wakaberekwa nevhu  
Powerful and strong rakatitakura tese  
Misodzi yako neyangu yanyorovesa pasi

Nyarara kuchema, uri nyenyedzi  
Nyarara kuchema, kana murima uchapenya

Mira wakasimba, ivhu rakabata midzi yako  
Pasi hapadedere hapateti, newe usadendera  
Ndinewe mumweya  
Inzwi rangu riri kumhepo  
Nyemwerero yangu iriri munyenyedzi dzedenga

Nyarara kuchema, uri nyenyedzi  
Nyarara kuchema, kana murima uchapenya

It is the earth that consumed me and it is from the earth that you emerge. Powerful and strong it will anchor us all. Your tears, my tears, their tears water the earth. You daughter are as powerful as the earth that feeds and nourishes, that anchors and holds. Hold firm and steady, pasi hapadedere hapateti saka iwe unodendera chii mwana wevhu. Ndinewe mumweya, my voice is in the wind, my smile is in the twinkling of the stars. Daughter of mine, daughter of the earth, hold your head high. You are a star, shine daughter shine!!!

## Chirungurira: 'Heart Burn'

Ndine chirungurira, ndine chigumbu. Hanzi aku-pa ronda ati nhunzi dzikudye

My whole life is about what if's  
What is my mother was still alive  
What if my little brother had not died  
What is I knew where my father is  
What if I had relatives that care about me  
Ndakarerwa murudo. Rudo rwaamai nababa nekahanzvadzi kaindiyemura. Baba vakarwara kusvika pakushaya. Takadzurwa moyo, sepwere ndaiziva kuti ndarasikirwa asi handina kuziva kuti ndiko kwaizova kushanduka kwehupenyu hangu. Pakuvigwa kwababa pakadaidzwa vana vemufi kumusoro kwebox asi kwakaendeswa hanzvadzi yangu chete. Zvakambandinetsa asi semwana ndakashaya wekubvunza. Three months after my father's death, my little 5 year old brother passed away too leaving my mother and I alone. Ndipo pakauya hama dzababa kuzatora zvinhu zvese mumba. 'Hanzvadzi yedu hapasisina, mwana wedu hapasisina saka unogarirei pano.' That is the day I discovered that the man I had called dad was not my biological father.

I begged my mother to tell me about my father, but she said he had wanted nothing to do with the pregnancy. I had no birth certificate and my mother kept promising to find one of my 'relatives' to assist. Pasi-na nguva, mhamha vakabva va-

tanga kurwara kusvika pakushaya. I was 13 years old and suddenly no one was let in my life, baba vandaiziva, amai zvese nehanzvadzi. Paha-mo pana mbuya vakati vanonditora kuti ndigare navo. I became her nanny and housekeeper. Chero magetsi ariko vaiti ndibikire panze pamoto nekukweshwa mapoto etsito. Ndakanga ndiri muranda mumba mavo, kana kuchikoro handina kuendeswa. Rangu rakanga riri rekuchengeta imba nemucheche. Vamwe vaienda kuchikoro ndakatarisa kusvika muचेचे asvika zera rekutanga chikoro ndakabva ndadzingwa na Ambuya vava.

I struggled to make my own life, finding ways to survive. Hunting for relatives. Ndakazovika pakuroorwa ndiine 17 years asi moyo wangu nanhasi uchiri kupisa. Vanin'ina vaama hapana kana aiva nehanya neni, ndakakubvunzai kuti muri vanin'ina vaamai vangu chaivo here mukati hongu asi hanya neni makanga musina. Kana ainditengera bhurungwa remukati haro hapana. Asi izvozvi mese mava kunditsvaga, vamwe vari kudaidzira kuti vari kuda roora kubva kumurume wangu. Ndine moto muchipfuva, kubva pandakaroorwa mava kundida kanamuine matambudziko asi ndikawirwa nedambudziko ndinotambura ndiri ndega. Pakauya mukomana aiti mwana wehanzvadzi yababa vangu, achiti akatarisa chiso changu oti 'ndiri kubva ndatoona sekuru vangu.'

Pangu pamba ndipo pane choto chinounganidza mese. Atonhorwa anouya, ane nzara anouya. Asi moto weshungu uri mumoyo mangu hapana ari kuuonawo here, ndoudzimura nei moto uyu usati wandiparadza. Baba kwamuri ikoko ndinechishuvo chekukuonai chiso chenyu, chekukuudzai zviri pakati pemoyo wangu, ndinoda muzive hupenyu hwandararama imi henyu muri vapenyu. Nhasi ndakura ndava nehupenyu hangu mava kunditsvaga, kuzvirova dundundu muchiti mune muzukuru nemukwasha. Pandaishupika makanga muri kupi. Huyai mutaure mashoko amuri kutumira makatarisa chiso changu nekuti ini ndaneta kuita bhora renyu mese, ndisiyei ndakadaro.





## They see technology & celebrate...

## ...But for us...that technology has fueled violence, disharmony, anger: It is the source of misery!

8 years of marriage, 8 years of my precious life  
8 years murume wangu, 8 chaidzo  
8 good years- wasted!

.....I remember how we used to go out dancing together  
I remember how you held me close, how your eyes lit up as you stared at me with desire  
Tana twakakwidza taingoti hwerere hwerere takananga muimba yedu yemukati  
Hungava husiku, kuseni seni kana zuva rakache-ka nyika  
Tainge mukomana nemusikana isu tatova nemhuri

The swing of my hips made you go wild  
8years of marriage and the flame continued to burn  
Do you remember the day you called me saying there was an emergency at home?  
Ndakakumbira sawhira wangu kuti anditarisire musika wangu ini ndokumhanya kumba  
Only to find you laying on the bed, eyes burning with desire and telling me you could not wait till later to have me. Afterwards we walked hand in hand uchindiperekedza kumusika kwangu.

Gogogoi!!! That is how pedzai entered our home. Pedzai rudo, pedzai rufaro, pedzai mhu-sha.  
From the day you brought pedzai that is the day our family fell apart. Iye zvino kakangoti twitwi kurira wotosiya zvauri kuita kuti uverenge kuti zviru kunzii. Kana vaunotaura navo pawhatsapp yako iyoyo handivaziva. We live in the house together but you are now in a world of your own. You no longer even touch me, kapedzai ikaka ndiko kava mudzimai wako, kakangorira che-

ro takarara unomuka uchipindura. Zvapedzai zvinoitirwa kunze uko, imba yekurara murume wangu inoyera kana yaparadzwa napedzai hapachina musha.

Now I know it is Miriam you have been chatting with on what's app, sms, facebook- you are ever glued to your phone. 'Hanzi nhasi ndinokupa zvekuti unoti jerusarema razarurwa.' I have no more words for you. I suggest you go to Miriam. I built this home with my two hands, kana hembeyangu chaiyo ndisingatenge ndichiti vana vadye vapfeke, thinking you and I were fending for our family. Nhasi ndochiona kuti mari unobata asi yako ndeyekutenga iko kapedzai kanogara kari muhomwe yepaditi nekuchengeta vana Miriam. I have done all I can, kana usingachandide rega nditakure hangu vana ndiende, ndagara ndini ndiri kuchengeta. 8years murume wangu, 8 years baba vevana. Nhasi rinozaruka jerusarema iwe wakananga musiuwo uyo!!!

## First Love

I had the biggest crush on a girl in my school...

...my heart skipped a beat as soon as she walked into the classroom.  
...I stared at her distracted by her presence, her confidence. The way she laughed and gestured with her beautiful long fingers as she explained answer in class. She did not seem to notice me at all and I hated her to bits for it. Could she not see??? When my teacher shuffled the class around she became my desk-mate and we became really good friends, I wanted to tell her how I felt but I imagined how angry she would be with me. I was a girl, how could I explain having such feelings for another girl. In the end I preferred to have her as a friend than tell her than risk losing the friendship.

I was confused about my feelings, the way I felt was not 'normal'. I became extremely religious, my bible and church became my entire world. I begged God to exorcise this demon from me as I constantly heard people who like the same sex being described as demon possessed. The prayers and church did not help for long, my suppressed feelings manifested in my dreams. I constantly dreamt of girls. Finally at 15 I decid-



ed the only way I could cope was to drown myself in alcohol. I began drinking and smoking, perhaps this way the dreams and desires would stop and I could stop thinking about girls. Why couldn't I just be normal and like boys like the other girls in my class.

Finally a new girl came to our school and she was just like me. Finally I had found someone who made me feel like it was ok to be myself. She explained that there was counselling and support for young people like us to come to terms with our sexual identities. 'Sexual identities' it sounded so complicated, all I knew and cared about was that I loved other women and that I needed to accept myself. I am now sure of myself, I still cannot tell my parents or my siblings. I am afraid of their rejection but I would like them to know how I feel. I am normal, different does not mean bad. If you look at me do I not look human???

## When my mother created monsters...

They sang and danced as his body lay in that coffin. I could see him walk away back turned to me. Baba baba, I wanted to call out to him but I could not. I watched finally as they lowered him in that grave. With every grain of earth my dreams were buried.

Your body was barely cold when my brothers took over the family. Masimba ese ehubaba amaivapa imi naamai vachikura akabva avabata. They took control of everything you had left behind. The buses, the businesses and the trucks. Noone dared to ask questions, mother was weak with grief and before we knew it everything was gone. Suddenly there was nothing left, mhamha had to start letting out rooms in the house to raise enough money for my fees, whilst my brothers were living large on the inheritance they had taken.

I watched my mother sacrifice everything she had to send me to school. When I dared to ask for money from my brothers I was beaten and threatened, told to go to the street and whore myself for a living after all, girls were all nothing but whores anyway. I cannot understand why my sister and I were seen as lesser beings simply because we are girls. Amai I know you too are suffering at the hands of your sons but you know that you played a part in raising them this way. You used to constantly tell them they were the fathers of the household, the controllers and disciplinarians, now look at them. You have created bullies, wife batterers: Monsters. They have destroyed you, us, their wives- everybody.

A pledge to self, to those long departed, to generations to come I hereby make: I too will be a mother soon and when that time comes I will raise my sons to love and respect not to dominate and control. I will not create monsters!!!



This journal, is a record of just some of the stories that we shared Pachoto in 2013.

The Pachoto space has given to us an understanding of the daily struggles some girls and women have encountered in their lifetime; and has also beamed a light into their long cherished dream for a brighter and more fulfilling life. These are women who work hard to keep their families afloat in an country where girls and young women are viewed as lesser beings, and violations against them are rampant. These women are bread winners but their contribution in the family is not recognised. Others are stuck in abusive relationships, due to fear, and sometimes, they are just overwhelmed by a feeling of hopelessness; in a country where crime is rampant, where corruption is rife; in an economy of uncertainties; and a currency that is hard to find- they find themselves hostage in unpleasant situations.

When you listen to each of the stories, you are listening to the story of that woman on the bus to the market, the women on the queue is a shop, or even the teller, that lady preacher in church, the student who is forced to trade her body for survival, or the nurse. It is the story of that girl who dropped out of school and feels hopeless, a hopelessness that pervades her entire life- from her own self-image, to relationships, to her own ability to speak out on injustices, demand and access her rights. But it is also a story of victory, many victories. Because she was strong enough to survive and has lived to tell her story; which feeds the commitment to fight for social change.

The women, who have boldly told their stories Pachoto, are our great (s)heroes, and we see (s)heroes everywhere, even the women who sat in silence and listened, but are part of this great agenda towards the attainment of women's rights. It is our hope that stories in this journal will inspire someone to seek help.

Yet it is clear to us that even under those circumstances, these women have emerged victors.

'From their experiences, Katswe Sistahood is able to identify the challenges and gaps in women's empowerment programmes and initiatives in Zimbabwe. The stories have also given us an understanding of the common threads in girls and women's experiences, that we can pull together, and use these to work towards social transformation and gender justice

Katswe acknowledges that while story telling itself can usher one onto a healing path, it is equally important for individuals to link up with service providers who have the capacity to play a support role on this journey.

Hence we end this journal by providing contact details of some of the organisations and institutions that offer different kinds of support, in Zimbabwe. We hope you will find it helpful.



# Ending the Story



## V. Key HMB Resources for Women Activists

Do not hesitate to shout for help- Be a sister's keeper

Organisation/ Individual	Thematic areas	Range of Services Offered
Adult Rape Clinic (ARC) University of Zimbabwe Department of Medicine Mbuya Nehanda Maternity Hospital Harare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Counselling,</li> <li>Referral services to adult rape survivors</li> </ul>	At ARC traumatised girls from age 16 to elderly women of up to 70 receive specialised management and are offered a platform to safely discuss their personal problems. Patients are also reviewed medically and psychosocially, and receive medical examination for court processes, as well as collection of forensic evidence for the court process. Patients are referred to Musasa for further counselling services and to the Victim Friendly Unit ZRP. The clinic has at any one time a police officer stationed in the premises to offer required help.
Batanai AIDS Trust (B.A.T) 6 RekeyiTangwena Masvingo 263-39-264960 batanai@bhaso.org pmarimi@bhaso.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HIV/AIDS counselling</li> <li>Psychosocial support services</li> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Communication/information dissemination</li> </ul>	B.A.T promotes the empowerment of the HIV&AIDS infected and affected through skills development and information sharing at all levels. It provides psychosocial support, facilitates the formation, coordination and empowerment HIV&AIDS support groups.
Counselling Services Unit (CSU) Suite 1, Raleigh Street Harare 00263-4-773496, 00263-4-772843	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Body work</li> <li>Communication/information dissemination</li> </ul>	CSU offers medical and psycho-social support to victims of organized violence and torture as well as training organizations with basic counselling skills. Currently, CSU is running a protection pack program that provides critical information on community protection strategies. CSU also has documentation services to guard against the recurrence of past abuses.
Emthonjeni Women's Forum (EWF) 32A George Silundika, between 1st/2nd Avenue, Bulawayo 00263-775 547 301, 00263-712 717 654 emthonjeniwf@gmail.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Body work</li> <li>Gender based violence</li> <li>HIV/AIDS</li> <li>Human Right</li> <li>Sexual Rights</li> </ul>	EWF provides an opportunity and platform for targeted communities to challenge the behaviours, beliefs and customs that promote domestic violence and abuse of women's rights in Zimbabwe. It also assists survivors of domestic violence to make informed decisions about their situations, providing information on women's rights especially SRHR and its linkages to gender based violence and HIV/Aids.



Organisation/ Individual	Thematic areas	Range of Services Offered
Female Prisoners Support Trust (FPST) 104 Central Ave, Harare 00263772809978 femprist@gmail.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Communication and information dissemination</li> </ul>	FPST aims to build the capacity of female prisoners in areas of economic empowerment through training in lifetime skills, health and reproductive health rights including HIV/AIDS, and to create platforms where female prisoners independently meet and share pertinent issues affecting them. The organisation also mobilises resources for use by female prisoners
Girl Child Network (GCN) 16352, Bazooka Avenue, Zezegeza 4, Chitungwiza 0778-237116, 0772-288251 girlchildnetworkzim@gmail.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Communication/information dissemination</li> <li>Women's sexual rights</li> </ul>	GCN engages all stakeholders including communities, schools, government and policymakers in advocacy and lobbying for eradication of practices, which impede the girl child's full physical, emotional, spiritual growth and development. It also disseminates information on the girls' rights to HIV treatment and education and psychosocial support as a result of child sexual abuse, as well as to promote the reproductive health of girls through advocating for the provision and improved access to reproductive health facilities.
Alliance of Home Based Care Givers (Groots Zimbabwe) Address: Suite 706 Fidelity Life Centre, Cnr 11th Ave/Fife St, Bulawayo, 00263-779617926, 00263-772975166	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HIV/Aids</li> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Body work</li> </ul>	GROOTS Zimbabwe facilitates training of HIV/Aids caregivers in income generating projects (IGPs) such as piggery, poultry, peanut butter making, and gardening. The CBO has also launched various advocacy and lobbying programs targeting communities as well as community, traditional, and church leaders. They are advocating for irrigation schemes, small grain cropping, rural women prioritization in agricultural inputs distribution, and land allocation to landless women including those with a passion for farming and are also in the process of training caregivers in resource mobilization as a way of broadening rural women capital base.
Human Rights NGO Forum (NGO Forum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research and documentation for communication purposes – putting a spotlight on all forms of violence and other violations of human rights</li> </ul>	The NGO Forum deals with cases of state sponsored violence or organised violence.

Organisation/ Individual	Thematic areas	Range of Services Offered
Initiatives of Change (IoC) Violet Magodo 0772413396	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Body work</li> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Women's rights movement building</li> <li>Peace building</li> </ul>	IoC creates peace through formation of empowerment circles of 8 – 12 women in the locations, villages and in the market place where they do various discussions and lobby for peace and reconciliation.
Jekesapfungwa/Vulingqondo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Psychosocial support</li> <li>Grassroots women's rights movement building</li> <li>Health and well-being</li> </ul>	Jekesapfungwa/Vulingqondo works towards women's economic empowerment, psychosocial support and training on HIV/AIDS. It has trained 90 community based care givers in palliative care for orphans and vulnerable children, set up psychosocial support camps and support groups for HIV/AIDS in Gokwe and Chipinge and has identified about 500 orphans and vulnerable children.
Katswe Sistahood (Katswe) katswesistahood@gmail.com 00263 772 978 880 00263 772 689 001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Body work</li> <li>Communication and information</li> </ul>	Katswe works with young women in Zimbabwe organising safe spaces for telling personal stories for healing purposes (pachoto), vagina monologues and feminist circles. The organisation also works on sexual reproductive health rights for women, and does body work for personal well-being of feminist activists.
Musasa 64 Selous Ave, Harare, Zimbabwe 00263-4-794983, 00263-4-706284 musasaproj@musasa.co.zw director@musasa.co.zw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Body work</li> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Psychosocial support</li> <li>Legal services</li> <li>Shelter</li> </ul>	Musasa focuses on domestic violence; particularly issues of counselling, basic legal aid with no court representation, and advocacy for law reform in that area. It also does public education on issues of domestic violence and has outreach units and shelters for abused women and children in the country. It has a shelter for survivors of domestic violence in Harare, and is planning to set up a safety house to shelter survivors of politically motivated violence during the forthcoming elections.
North Star Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Bodywork</li> <li>Grassroots women's rights movement building</li> </ul>	North star Alliance offers training, counselling, health and heart-mind-body services to sex Workers in Hwange and Victoria Falls. The organisation also helps sex workers set up projects for economic empowerment.



Organisation/ Individual	Thematic areas	Range of Services Offered
Ntengwe for Community Development (NTENGWE) Address: 169 Courtney Selous, Vic Falls Elisabeth Markham 0712200455 01343342 elisabethm@ntengwe.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body work</li> <li>• Health and well-being</li> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Grassroots women's rights movement building</li> </ul>	Ntengwe has significant expertise in supporting women's rights, child and youth protection and sex workers for women's economic empowerment, women and markets and community participation. Ntengwe has extensively worked on peace building and conflict resolution, property and inheritance rights and prevention of gender based violence and the organization has developed a new module for grassroots women's participation as community paralegals for a training series on human rights.
Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) 2 Ernies Lane, Monavale Harare 00263-4-339421 www.researchandadvocacyunit.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body work</li> <li>• Communication and information</li> </ul>	RAU provides high-quality research for the purposes of relevant and current policy change. Its work to date has focused on three major areas that are important in the current crisis in Zimbabwe: Women, Displacements, and Governance. RAU works with a wide variety of Zimbabwean, regional, and international partners in connection with the above areas. RAU also provides independent analyses of important current issues in Zimbabwe, ranging from elections, the Global Political Agreement and legal matters.
Renew It Trust (RIT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Counselling</li> </ul>	RIT offers counselling services to victims of political violence as well as peace education in these communities. The organisation conducts community dialogues on peace building and conflict resolution at the community level.
Silveira House (SH) Arcturus Road, Chishawasha 00263-4-2935845 director@silveirahouse.org www.silveirahouse.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movement building</li> <li>• Communication/information</li> <li>• Peace building</li> </ul>	SH's peace building strategy involves training local leadership in conflict management and resolution at the community level. The organization's target group includes traditional leaders as well political structures.
Tree of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body work</li> <li>• Health and well-being</li> </ul>	Tree of Life provides healing through allowing participants to form empowerment circles of 10 to 12 people where they share their traumatic stories and get relief and healing. The organisation also specialises in holistic healing methods for the heart mind and body.

Organisation/ Individual	Thematic areas	Range of Services Offered
Women and Aids Support Network (WASN) 13 Walterhill Avenue, Eastlea, Harare, 00263-4-791401/4 director@mweb.co.zw www.wasn.org.zw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and well-being</li> <li>• Grassroots women's rights movement building</li> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Body work</li> <li>• Peace building</li> </ul>	WASN's main focus is on reproductive health rights of women and the girl child. WASN has mobile clinic pilot project with Chirumanzu and Lupane communities where it provides integrated health services to women and children.
Women's Action Group (WAG) 11 Lincoln Road, Avondale, Harare wag@wag.org.zw www.wagzim.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and well-being</li> <li>• Grassroots women's rights movement building</li> </ul>	Guided by a strong commitment to purpose, WAG provides information and tools to women in Zimbabwe in order to holistically address their rights. Create and increase public awareness on legal and health rights of women in Zimbabwe. Encourage women to be directly involved in making decisions on issues that affect their lives. Advocate for gender sensitive policies. Ensure that women have access to justice.
Zimbabwe Peace Project (Z.P.P) 00263-4-747719	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication – putting a spotlight on human rights violations and abuses</li> </ul>	Z.P.P's goal is to reduce violence and human rights violations through monitoring and documentation of human rights abuses and cases of political violence. ZPP operates in 10 provinces of the country and has two monitors per constituency.
Zimbabwe Young Women's Network for Peace (ZYWNP) graceru-vimbo@yahoo.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movement building</li> <li>• Peace-building</li> </ul>	ZYWNP does capacity building and training on democracy, good governance and conflict transformation.
Survivors in Action Zimbabwe Trust (SAZT) 17223 Unit M, Seke, Chitungwiza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urgent action</li> <li>• Body work</li> <li>• Health and well-being</li> <li>• HIV/Aids</li> </ul>	SAZT provides anti-GBV campaigns, training of peer educators, survivor rescue and support, economic empowerment and traditional leaders training.
Fountain of Faith Women (FoFW) Mabvuku	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body work</li> <li>• Grassroots women's rights movement building</li> <li>• Psycho-social support</li> </ul>	FoFW is a group of Muslim women operating from Mabvuku in Harare. The organisation specialises in empowerment circles for story-telling, heart-mind-body and also in meditation for health and well-being.



Organisation/ Individual	Thematic areas	Range of Services Offered
Dr Dickson Chibanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Psychosocial support</li> <li>• Communication/information,</li> <li>• Health and well-being</li> </ul>	Dr Chibanda works with female survivors of DV, PMV and any other forms of violence in Mbare. He collects statistics on violence against women and uses them to lobby government and other stakeholders to support the women get rehabilitated back into society. He also provides counselling and psycho-social support.
Dr Michelle Strydom, Mpilo hospital, Bulawayo tammy@eagleswings.co.zw 0777552915, website www.eagleswings.co.zw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and well-being</li> <li>• Bodywork</li> <li>• Counselling</li> </ul>	Dr Strydom uses research findings as well as the bible to help women and men get well embarking on a journey into science, anatomy and the physiology of the body as well as the Bible. Latest cutting edge medical research has confirmed what the bible said about health and disease thousands of years ago and is proven to be more scientifically accurate in the area of disease than medicine has been in the past 60 years. Teaching women various methods of heart-mind-body healing, she believes that de-toxifying thoughts is a method of healing, and explains facts of the brain and how 87% of all diseases are a result of what goes on in our thought life, and how this is converted into a physical reaction.
Nyahunure Community Trust (Nyahunure) c/o Francis Pawandwa Mutoko RDC, Mutoko	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movement building</li> <li>• Healing circles</li> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Economic empowerment</li> </ul>	Nyahunure empowers women through gender training, economic empowerment, heart-mind-body and grassroots movement building for gender aware communities.
Sonke Girls Chirumanzu Growth Point Masvingo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and well-being</li> <li>• Bodywork</li> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Healing circles</li> <li>• Economic empowerment</li> </ul>	This is a group of sex workers coming together for economic empowerment and SRHR. The group share information on HIV/Aids, SHRH, heart-mind-body, vigilante groups/peace committees against VAW during political upheavals.

Organisation/ Individual	Thematic areas	Range of Services Offered
Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (ACPDT)	Training on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Peace-building</li> <li>• Good governance</li> <li>• Democratic Sustainable Development</li> </ul>	ACPDT is an internally driven process of change rooted in community wisdom, creativity and solidarity. It combines community based research, publishing, education and organising. It enables impoverished and traumatised people to develop confidence, articulate the experiences, concerns and aspirations, communicate and use the constructive power of persuasion and organisation to participate effectively in public affairs, resolve conflicts and engage local development initiatives.
Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association (ZWLA). T: (04)706676, 706719, 706820 Bulawayo Office T: (09)887186-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's Legal Rights</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Legal Education</li> <li>• Women's Legal Rights</li> </ul>	ZWLA's mission is to develop, defend and dialogue on women and children's rights. ZWLA operates. ZWLA seeks to initiate, facilitate and support the creation of a constructive and equitable justice system that treats men and women as equal citizens and actively addresses the rights of children. Our Goal as an organisation is to promote a Zimbabwean society where women are empowered and assert their rights within a justice system that treats men and women equally and that is sensitive to the needs of children.
Zimbabwe Lawyer For Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Interest Litigation</li> <li>• Human Rights Training</li> <li>• HIV and the Law</li> </ul>	ZLHR's core objective is to foster a culture of human rights in Zimbabwe as well as encourage the growth and strengthening of human rights at all levels of Zimbabwean society through observance of the rule of law.
Pat Warren pwarren@zol.co.zw +263 4 490085	Training on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-defense</li> <li>• Body work</li> <li>• Judo as a sport or what is known as "The Gentle Way"</li> </ul>	Pat Warren is a renowned instructor; her workshop was voted "the most practical" by participants from over fifteen countries at a training convention for instructors in the USA.
Kubatana.net	Directory	An Online directory of Zimbabwean NGOs, civil society organisations and social justice groups