



Teresia Wairimu – A Success Story



Life is unpredictable and unfair to some, and I happen to be one of the people who have had the hardest life. My name is Teresia Wairimu and a senior citizen in our country Kenya. I am 75 years old and a mother of three boys.

My mother gave birth to me and my two siblings out of wedlock and this was a bad omen in our Kikuyu culture. One child was acceptable, but three children meant no marriage for you. During that time marriage was highly regarded and single parenthood was despised.

When my mother got a chance to get married, she got into it without thinking twice. I was only three years old, and my brothers were four and five years respectively. My father rejected us from day one, but we persevered, so much due to our mother who was trying to make her marriage work.

Darkness Falls on me

When I turned ten years my stepfather showed his true colours and would drink and come demanding to have sex with me. I would report to my mother and she would always warn me not to tell people because her marriage would be ruined. One night my stepfather came home very drunk and walked into our room demanding to have sex with me. I started crying and resisting and surely he had his way. When I reported to my mother he denied and chased me from his house. I ran into our neighbours house and slept there.

In the morning my mother came and requested our neighbour to get me a job in Nairobi where I was taken and became a house help at the age of ten years.

Calamities never come singularly but follow one another. I had only stayed in that house for one-and-a-half years when the man of the house defiled me. The woman chased me, and I opted to go to the street instead of returning home. It was while in the street I came across one of the water vendors who used to supply water to us and agreed to house me as a wife. I went willingly as there was sign of love, shelter, and food.

Into the Fire

At the age of twelve years, I was married and expecting my first born. The man was showing love at the beginning but immediately after I delivered, he changed and started drinking and not providing. The second day after delivery he came home drunk and demanded to have sex with me, yet my wounds were so fresh and had been stitched. I informed him that I was in pain, but he turned a deaf ear to me and force himself into me. It was so painful that I cut more and started bleeding heavily. He took me to the hospital and lied I had fallen, but I could not defend myself because I had nowhere to go. I was stitched once more and cautioned to be extra careful.

By the second month I conceived again and decided not to go to the clinic because I was embarrassed. I nursed my pregnancy and took care of my baby as he continued having rough sex with me. I gave birth to my second born when the first born was only eleven months old. Immediately after the second-born arrived, my husband stopped providing. I stayed in the house for one week, but when the food I had got finished, I started looking for casual jobs. I would wash clothes for people to buy food for my children. My husband would come home and demand food and later have sex with me. Within three months, I again conceived, and he continued mistreating and mishandling me.

One evening he came home very drunk and demanded to have sex before eating. I told him I was not feeling well but he did not listen. He took a rope, tied my both legs wide apart and raped me severally without caring or listening to the children who were crying. After he was satisfied and tired, he left me to untie myself. I cried the whole night cuddling my babies and early in the morning I packed and left. I went to Mathare estate and got a room which my friend paid for me. Other well-wishers bought food for my children, and this marked the beginning of parenting as a single mom.

Parenting as a Single Mother

I gave birth to my third-born at the end of the year and continued raising the three boys alone. It was not easy but there was peace in the house. We used to live from hand to mouth and sometimes we would sleep hungry but in peace.

I took my children to school and when they came of age, and they all completed primary and joined high school. I did all casual jobs to raise fees, applied for bursaries, and looked for well wishers to help me in paying fees. All my children completed high school and started doing casual jobs and life improved for all of us.

As I stated from the beginning, life is never fair. One morning when I was doing my casual job, I received a phone call from the police station informing me that my son had been arrested for defrauding Standard Bank of 2.6 million shillings.

My life came into a standstill, and I got confused. I ran to the police station and found my son crying like a small baby. He informed me he was innocent and had only applied for a job as a cleaner at the bank and that's how his documents had been used for defrauding the bank.

He was taken to cell and the following day taken to court where he was prosecuted for fraud. My son denied the charges hence the judge ordered him to be remanded for two weeks for investigation. After two weeks, we went back to court and my son was brought before the judge. This was not easy for me – I cried from Mathare to the court. I would walk all the way as I had no bus fare. I would leave the house at 4am so that I could get there on time and relax before the Court was in session. The Standard Bank officers never turned up for the hearing, so the judge pushed it to the next month. I requested bail and the judge gave us a bail of 200,000 shillings (about \$2,000). If getting bus fare was a problem, where was I going to get 200,000 shillings? We went to court three times without the Bank representatives turning up for the case in court.

During this time a friend of mine told me about Baraka Women's Center and the way they usually stand with women, especially single mothers. She informed me that even if they don't give me money, I will get counselled and directed to the relevant office where I can get help. I visited the Center where I met teacher Wanjiru who listened to my story and believed in me. Straight away I felt the weight going down. She told me that they have no money but the God in heaven shall perform a miracle and if the boy is innocent, he will be released without any bail. She told me to wait for Teresia and Pastor Cyrus and they would advise me accordingly.

When they finally came, the three of them and I sat together, and I got more counselling. I love the words said to me by Teresia, and I quote "Silver and gold we do not have but the God who is in heaven will open the door and the boy will be released. "Pastor Cyrus prayed for me, and they told me to go in peace. I was given fare and went home.

On the day to go to court, I woke up early and by 4am I was on my way. I arrived at Milimani court at 6am and just stayed outside as I cried. The watchmen saw me crying and came to my aid. They allowed me to go and stay in the corridor.

The court opened at 9am. When the judge started the cases, my son was called first. When my son was brought to the dock, I busted into tears; my son was looking malnourished, his clothes were torn, and had tied his trouser with a string to fit him. The judge looked at him and couldn't believe he was still in remand. She asked whether I was present, and I stood up and cried again. As usual the bank was not represented, and the judge said that if the young man had stolen the bank would not miss the hearing at the Court. She looked at me and asked me how much I was willing to pay for the bail. I stood up and informed the judge that I had nothing and even fare I was given by a neighbour. Lawyers stood from different corners and contributed 90,000 shillings (about \$900).

The judge asked whether I had an identification card and my son's. She said she would release my son with those two documents. When the media people came to capture the story, she confronted them and ordered them to stop. She complained that when I needed people to help me with money, the media didn't capture the story asking people to bail my son out, but now they want the story to hit the headline to make money. The bank is not interested with the matter and that's why they are missing. As a result, my son was discharged, and I went home with him. Some lawyers gave us fare and money to buy food. What can I say but "Thank God" – whom I was told by Teresia and Wanjiru would answer my prayer?

That's why I am here at BWC to say thanks and thanks again because silver and gold they didn't have but the God they worship opened the cell doors for my son to get through. They have promised to fundraise and get money to buy me a bed, pay my rent arrears for four months, and start a small business for me. BWC is surely a place for women who are desperate and have nowhere to go. One day with them changed my life completely. Long live BWC!

Story told by Teresia Wairimu at Baraka Women's Center, Nairobi, Kenya May 2022
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