

Issue 01

ILLUMINATE HER INNER LIGHT

The Mental Health Magazine

HER LIGHT WAS NEVER LOST... ONLY AWAITING TO SHINE.



REAL STORIES. REAL PEOPLE. REAL HEALING.

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MORE THAN A NAME

My name is Nikiwe R. Jilimba , and before you continue reading this magazine, I think it's only fair that you get to know the person behind it. I am a 19 year old pageant Queen/model , contemporary dancer , artist and I'm the founder of Simnikiwe Foundation & Illuminate Her Inner Light-The Mental Health Magazine. For a long time, I thought strength meant keeping everything to myself. I thought I had to be okay all the time. I thought I had to smile through the pain, pretend I was fine, and carry my struggles in silence.

The truth is, I wasn't fine. Like many young people, I have experienced seasons of darkness that I never imagined I would have to face. I have struggled with depression, social anxiety, panic attacks, anger, self-doubt, and the weight of experiences that no child should have to carry. I have known what it feels like to be bullied, body shamed, rejected, misunderstood, and hurt by people I trusted. There were moments when I questioned my worth. Moments when I looked in the mirror and only saw the things I wished I could change. Moments when I felt completely alone, even when I was surrounded by people. And if I'm being completely honest, I am still learning. I am still healing. I am still growing.

I am not a perfect person, and I don't want this magazine to be built on the idea that anyone has to be perfect. I have made mistakes. I have allowed my pain to turn into anger. I have had to learn difficult lessons about forgiveness, accountability, and extending grace to both myself and others.

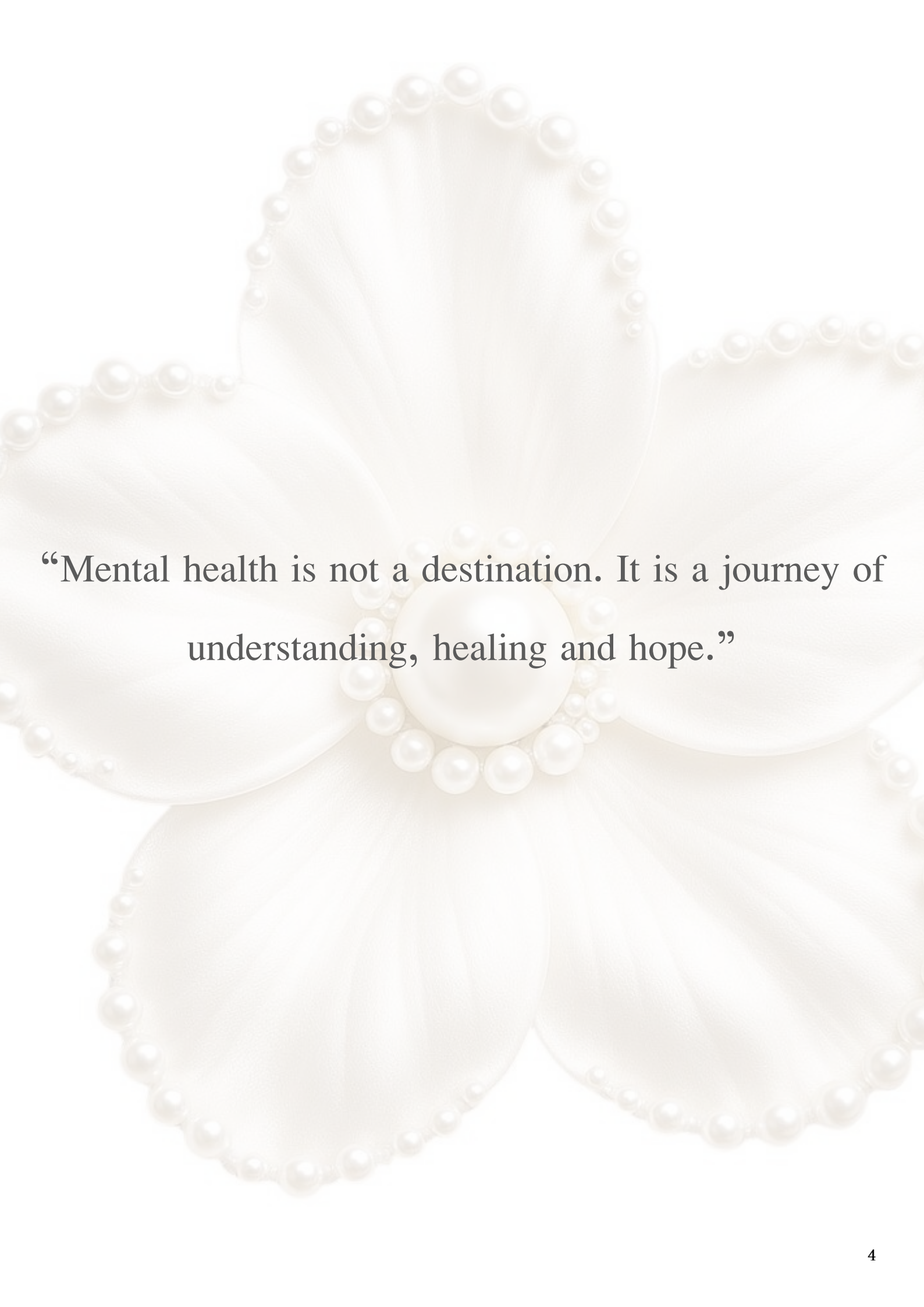
But somewhere along the way, I realised something powerful:

The things that tried to break us do not get to tell the final chapter of our story.

What once felt like my greatest weaknesses became the reason I became passionate about mental health and anti-bullying advocacy. The experiences that left scars also gave me compassion for people whose battles cannot be seen.

That is why Illuminate Her Inner Light exists.





“Mental health is not a destination. It is a journey of understanding, healing and hope.”

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH ?

When people hear the words “mental health,” many immediately think of mental illness. But mental health is much more than that.

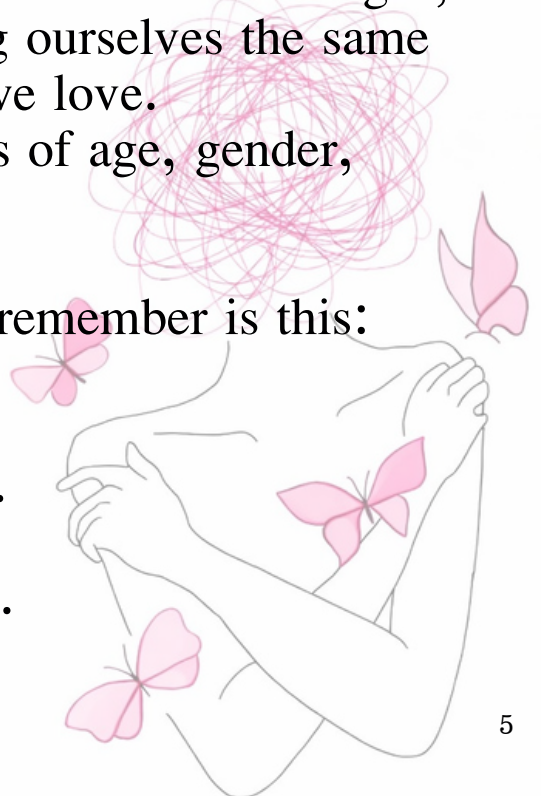
Mental health is part of our everyday lives. It influences how we think, how we feel, how we respond to challenges, how we build relationships, and how we navigate the world around us. Just as we all have physical health, we all have mental health.

Some days we feel motivated, confident, and emotionally balanced. Other days we may feel overwhelmed, anxious, exhausted, stressed, or emotionally drained. These experiences are part of being human.

Taking care of our mental health does not mean we will never struggle. It means learning how to cope with life’s challenges, knowing when to ask for help, and giving ourselves the same compassion we would offer to someone we love. Mental health affects everyone, regardless of age, gender, background, or circumstance.

And perhaps the most important thing to remember is this:

Struggling does not make you weak.
Asking for help does not make you weak.
Being human does not make you weak.
Mental health matters because you matter.



UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Mental health conditions are more common than many people realise. Many people around us may be struggling silently, and sometimes we may not even notice it. While everyone's experience is different, here are some common mental health conditions you may have heard about:

Depression

Depression is more than just feeling sad for a day or two. It can make someone feel empty, hopeless, tired, or lose interest in things they once enjoyed.

Anxiety

Anxiety is when feelings of worry, fear, or nervousness become overwhelming and start affecting everyday life.

PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)

PTSD can happen after someone experiences or witnesses something traumatic or frightening. It can make it difficult for them to feel safe, even after the situation has ended.

Bipolar Disorder

People with bipolar disorder can experience significant changes in their mood, energy levels, and emotions.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders involve unhealthy relationships with food, eating habits, or body image. They are serious conditions and should never be dismissed.

Burnout

Burnout can happen when someone has been under stress for a long time. It can leave a person feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausted.

A Quick Reminder

Social media can create awareness, but it cannot diagnose you. If you are concerned about your mental health, speak to a trusted adult, counsellor, psychologist, or healthcare professional.

Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.



HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS STRUGGLING

Sometimes the people who seem okay are carrying the heaviest burdens.

If someone you care about is struggling with their mental health, remember that you do not have to have all the answers.

Often, the best thing you can do is simply be there.

- Listen without judging.
- Let them talk at their own pace.
- Check in on them, even if it's just a simple "How are you doing today?"
- Remind them that they are not alone.
- Encourage them to seek help if they need it.
- Be patient. Healing takes time.

What Doesn't Help

- ✗ "Just get over it."
- ✗ "Other people have it worse."
- ✗ "You're being dramatic."
- ✗ "Just think positive."

Most importantly, don't try to fix them.

Just remind them that they don't have to face their struggles alone.

Sometimes your presence can mean more than the perfect words ever could.



Mamello Mokoena



My story began on 7 April 2017, although the signs had appeared months before. I was losing weight despite eating normally, but I never imagined that a simple visit to the doctor would end with me being rushed to the emergency room.

At that age, I was confused more than anything else. Everyone around me seemed worried, yet no one was really explaining what was happening. I watched people panic while trying to make sense of a situation I didn't understand myself.

When I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes, I was scared.

I didn't know what it meant for my future. I didn't know how my life would change. I didn't know how I would manage school, friendships, and my health all at once.

One of the hardest parts wasn't just the diagnosis itself—it was learning how to live with it.

I became anxious about what other people would think. I worried about how classmates and schoolmates would react. For months, I kept my diagnosis to myself because I wasn't ready to explain something I was still trying to understand.

Through the endless hospital visits, my family became my greatest source of strength. I remember my sister leaving her toddler at home so she could spend nights beside me in the hospital. We prayed together constantly, and those moments reminded me that I wasn't facing this battle alone.

Just when I thought I had finally adjusted to life with diabetes, another challenge arrived.

In 2022, I was diagnosed with anaemia.

This time was different. I was older and understood more about the condition, but accepting the reality of blood transfusions and regular hospital visits was incredibly difficult.



LIVING BEYOND DIABETES

*A*fter working so hard to manage my diabetes, it felt overwhelming to realise that hospitals would continue to be part of my life. For a while, it felt as though my life revolved around appointments, treatments, and medical challenges. Then another struggle emerged.

I found myself battling severe procrastination, difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts, and insomnia. My mind seemed unable to switch off. Every thought replayed itself repeatedly, making it difficult to focus or rest. Concerned about how this was affecting my life, I decided to seek professional help.

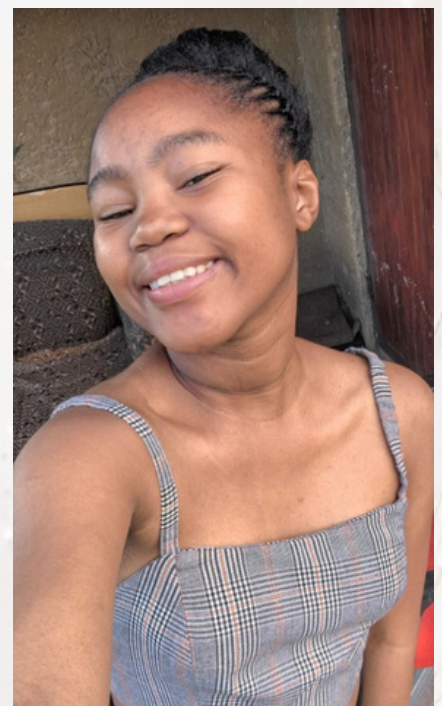
Receiving an ADHD diagnosis helped me understand myself in a way I never had before. For years, people had labelled me as lazy or assumed I simply didn't want to do certain things. What they didn't understand was that there was a deeper reason behind those struggles.

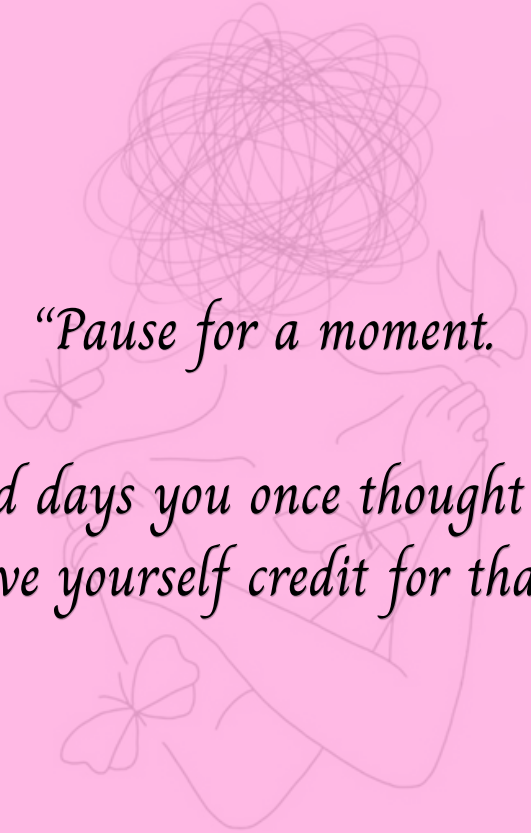
That diagnosis didn't define me—it helped me understand myself. It taught me that being different isn't something to be ashamed of. It's something to embrace. Looking back, I wouldn't change what I went through. The challenges were difficult, but they shaped me into the person I am today. They taught me resilience, adaptability, and the importance of giving myself grace.

Most importantly, they strengthened my faith. Today, I am proud of the person I have become. I am proud that I continued to move forward even when life felt overwhelming, and I am proud that I never lost hope.

To anyone facing a similar journey, I want you to remember this: stay steady in your faith. The road may be difficult, but there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

"You are stronger than you realise, and one day you will look back and see just how far you have come."





“Pause for a moment.

*You have survived days you once thought would break you.
Give yourself credit for that.”*

CHECKING IN WITH YOURSELF

Before you turn the page, take a moment to pause.

Life can get so busy that we forget to check in with the person we spend the most time with—ourselves.

There are no right or wrong answers here.



Be honest.

Be gentle.



And remember, this space is just for you.

How am I really feeling today?

What has been weighing heavily on my heart lately?

What is one thing I need to let go of?

What is one thing I need more of in my life right now?

A reminder to myself:

Healing
is not
linear



Give
yourself
grace

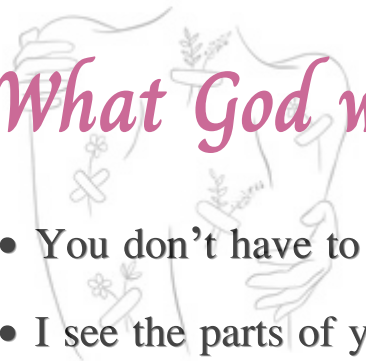


WHEN YOU FEEL HURT/BROKEN

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” — Psalm 147:3

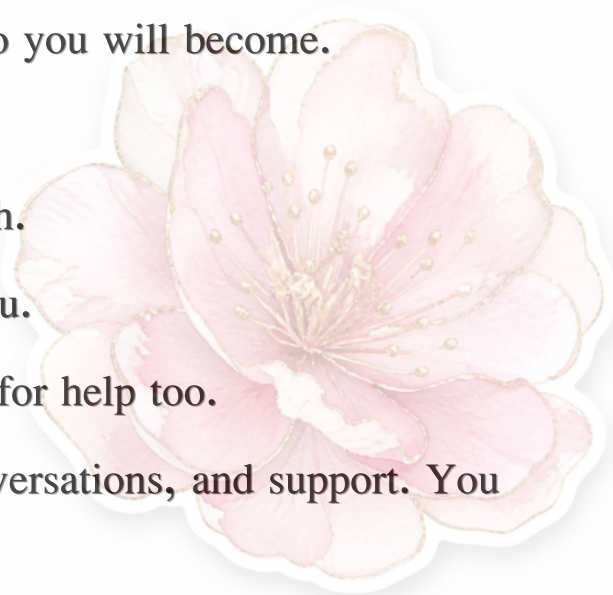


God does not expect you to come to Him perfectly put together. He meets us in our brokenness, confusion, and pain. Healing can take time, and sometimes God works through people, conversations, therapy, counselling, and the support we receive from others. Your wounds are not something you have to hide from Him.



What God wants you to remember

- You don't have to carry this alone. Give it to Me.
- I see the parts of you that you don't show anyone else.
- Your pain does not make you a burden.
- You are still worthy, even on the days you don't feel strong.
- I am with you in this season too.
- You can rest. You don't have to be strong every second.
- Your story is not over.
- What happened to you does not determine who you will become.
- You are allowed to ask for help.
- Seeking help does not mean you have lost faith.
- Talk to someone. Let someone walk beside you.
- Pray about it, but don't be afraid to reach out for help too.
- I can work through people, professionals, conversations, and support. You don't have to face everything alone.



Cugulethu Zwane



Before the titles, crowns, and achievements, there is a young woman with a story of resilience, healing, and growth. We sat down with her to talk about her journey, finding her voice, and using her experiences to create awareness for others.

Beyond the titles and pageants, who are you?

Beyond the titles and pageants I'd say I am practically a lady in her 20s doing her best to build herself. I am practically a resilient young woman who is deeply connected in her own journey and that incorporates me balancing my personal life, student life and basically dominating in the corporate space.

I am also someone who equally faces challenges on a daily basis like any other person. I try my level best to keep afloat by speaking out about vulnerable experiences, again not as a trigger to myself or the next person, but to create a culture where vulnerability is not measured against strength.

Last year you spoke up about experiencing physical abuse. What gave you the courage to share that publicly?

Well yes, I was assaulted physically and sexually in 2022 by a total stranger.

It truly wasn't merely strength, yet I feel I was called to share my experience. I felt the need to stand in my truth because the past years felt excruciating and on some days even simple things like socialising would feel like an absolute stretch.

When I finally gained the courage to share my story publicly, I was already exhausted and felt almost unsafe as I had no idea whether my case was going well or not.

Above all, it would pain me to see the statistics rise daily and I realised something profound: if I survived that, then it means there are many other women who have endured similar experiences silently, falling prey to mental health issues.

TURNING PAIN INTO PURPOSE



What was the hardest part about deciding to speak out?

I did not want pity, yet I needed my story to land on those who needed it as a form of support and to further create awareness on GBVF. That also includes sharing important information regarding attainable professional assistance available.

How did speaking up change things for you personally?

I feel that it helped me realise that what happened is in the past. In as much as it is a wound that heals seasonally, I should remember that if it becomes too much to handle, what's important for me is to remind myself that strength is also in the quiet moments of doubt and tiredness.

What message do you want to send to other young women who might be going through similar experiences?

For them to love themselves a little more, even on days when it feels hard to. Remember not to let yesterday take up too much of today.

What would you say to someone who's still silent about their own abuse?

I guess we are built differently, yet I advise speaking with family or trusted friends, or seeking counselling, or approaching the relevant professionals for help.

Experiencing abuse affects your mental wellbeing and that affects a lot of things—your progress, habits and relationships.

Therefore, it's always important to seek help sooner.



Looking ahead, what do you hope to do with your platform?

Looking ahead, I hope to grow my platform into spaces that allow me to create both social and legal impact.

As a law student, I know that I want to use the law to challenge injustice, advocate for vulnerable communities, and contribute to conversations that create meaningful change, particularly for women and young people.

More than anything, I want my platform to stand for purpose, grace, and perseverance—proof that a stubborn heart, guided by intention, can overcome almost anything.

TO THE GIRL I USED TO BE

Dear little me,

I wish I could sit beside you for a while. Not to change everything that happened, but just to let you know that you weren't as difficult, angry, or broken as you sometimes believed you were. You were a child trying to understand feelings that were much bigger than you. I know you made mistakes. I know there were moments when your anger made you hurt people, and moments when you carried your own insecurities and placed them onto others.

But you were still learning. You deserved to learn without believing that every mistake made you a bad person. I wish you knew how beautiful you were before the world made you question it. You spent so much time worrying about your body, your teeth, your smile, and whether you looked different from everyone else. One day, you'll smile without trying to hide your teeth.

You'll hear people compliment that same smile you once wanted to change. And you'll finally understand that God never made a mistake when He made you. You are going to go through things that will hurt you deeply. Some things will happen that no child should ever have to experience. There will be nights when you cry, moments when you feel angry, and days when you don't understand why life feels so heavy.

Please don't think you have to carry all of it alone. You will learn that asking for help isn't weakness. That crying doesn't make you weak. That healing doesn't mean forgetting. And that having faith doesn't mean you have to pretend you're okay when you're not. Most importantly, please don't give up on yourself. You don't have to become perfect. You just have to keep becoming.

One day, you'll look back at the girl you were and realise she was never the problem. She was just trying to find her way home to herself. And I'm proud of her.

*With love,
The woman she became.*



"Maybe healing is learning to hold the younger version of yourself with the kindness you always deserved."



Take a breath.
You made it here.



Rethabile Molo



Rethabile Molo is a 20-year-old STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) student at NMU from the Free State, South Africa, whose journey has been shaped by loss, responsibility, and resilience. At just 14, she lost her mother and found herself growing up much sooner than she ever expected. This is her story of grief, family, finding strength, and turning loss into legacy.

My Mother

Oh, my mother was such an amazing person. She loved everyone, loved to give, and cooking ran through her veins.

Long before she became sick, she was our foundation—gentle, deeply loving, and always attentive to the little details of our days. I still carry the vivid memory of how she would hold me. That presence made me feel completely safe, no matter what was happening outside our home.

She would also stay up late with me, helping me with my schoolwork. I remember her voice when she'd speak to us, the way her presence anchored our household, and the constant feeling that as long as she was there, everything was going to be alright.

When Everything Changed

Honestly, losing your mother at 14 years old feels like the ground beneath your feet has completely shattered.

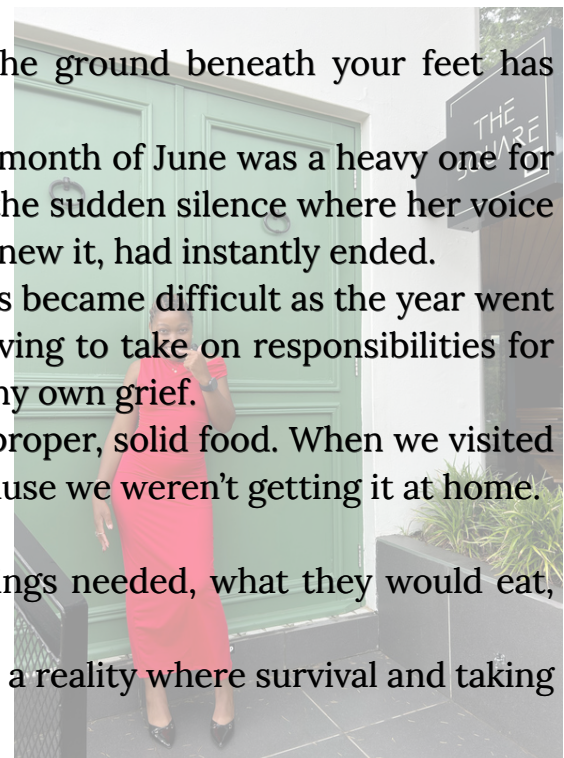
I remember it was during the 2020 COVID lockdown. The month of June was a heavy one for me, and I can still remember the disorienting fog of grief, the sudden silence where her voice used to be, and the jarring realization that childhood, as I knew it, had instantly ended.

My father had said that he would take care of us, but things became difficult as the year went on. He became increasingly absent, and I found myself having to take on responsibilities for my younger siblings while I was still trying to understand my own grief.

There were times when we would eat bread and not have proper, solid food. When we visited my aunt, she would know that we needed proper food because we weren't getting it at home. It was difficult because I was still a child too.

But somehow, I had to start thinking about what my siblings needed, what they would eat, how they were doing, and how to keep things moving.

My world went from being a place where I was cared for to a reality where survival and taking responsibility became immediate daily requirements.



LOSS TO LEGACY

Learning to carry it

It was physically and emotionally exhausting, but it eventually grew on me.

While my peers were enjoying their childhood and making the most of it, I was navigating the grief of losing a parent while managing household duties, checking on schoolwork, and stepping into a caretaking role. You learn to grow up overnight when you realize you're the only one forced to hold things together.

I was exhausted and sometimes I resented having to be so strong, but those feelings were quickly overshadowed by an urgent sense of duty to protect my siblings and keep our daily lives moving forward. Looking into my younger siblings' eyes every day was definitely the ultimate driving force. Whenever I felt overwhelmed or ready to give up, seeing them depend on me kept me going. I wanted to protect them from the harshness of the world as much as I possibly could and give them a sense of stability, even when my own heart felt heavy.

The love for my family kept me moving forward day after day, step by step.

From Loss to Legacy

I think my determination comes from a blend of honoring my mother's memory and a fierce desire to build a secure future. Education became my safe haven. It gave me back a piece of myself. Effort in, results out, and for once, I was the one in charge. Thriving in an STEM program is my way of proving that loss and hardship do not define my ultimate ceiling. What motivates me every day is knowing that my success can create stability not just for myself but for my family, ensuring that every sacrifice made along the way was worth it. I would want my mother to know that I never forgot the love she gave me, that her lessons survived in me and that I did everything in my power to protect and nurture our family just as she would have wanted.

I think she would pull me close, eyes full of proud tears and whisper:

"I am so proud of you, Nana. You walked through the darkness and became the light."



The Teacher Who Became Family

Oh, bless her heart. I could literally write a whole book about her. She was a true gift in my life at a moment when I needed a steady hand the most. What started in Grade 10 as an attentive teacher noticing a student in need evolved into a bond defined by profound maternal care and unconditional support. Moving in with her during my matric year provided the safe, structured and loving environment I required to focus fully on my education. She taught me how to believe in my own potential again, showed me what quiet strength looks like and loved me back into wholeness like her own. Without her guidance, patience and home, I would not be the resilient woman I am today.

Nonkululeko Ngqubuka



Nonkululeko was in Grade 10 when an unexpected health crisis changed the direction of her life. What began as severe abdominal pain during exam season became emergency surgery, missed exams, uncertainty, and a long road back to herself. But this isn't only a story about what happened to her. It's about what happened after.

"Everything happened so fast."

In Grade 10 during 2022, I was focused on preparing for exams and trying my best academically. However, during exam season, I started experiencing severe abdominal pain. At first, I thought it was just stress or exhaustion from studying, but the pain became unbearable.

After being taken to the hospital, doctors discovered that my appendix had burst, and I needed emergency surgery. When the pain wouldn't stop and the doctors told me that the tube inside me had burst, I was terrified and shocked. Everything happened so fast. One moment I was worried about exams, and the next I was facing surgery and uncertainty about my health. It was one of the scariest moments of my life.

Learning To Start Again

Recovery after the operation was extremely difficult. I was weak both physically and emotionally. Simple things like walking, eating properly, and moving around became challenging again. I had to slowly rebuild my strength day by day.

There were moments when I felt frustrated and hopeless, but I kept pushing myself to recover. Having my mom and sisters by my side made a huge difference. Their support gave me comfort during the darkest moments.

My mom especially stayed strong for me when I felt like giving up, and my sisters constantly reminded me that I wasn't alone. Their love and encouragement helped me keep fighting.



A DIFFERENT WAY FORWARD

Keep Going

Missing my exams was heartbreaking because I felt like all my hard work had gone to waste. I was scared that I would have to repeat Grade 10 and fall behind. When my mom fought for me to move forward, it gave me hope again. It reminded me that there were people who believed in me even when I doubted myself. What kept me going through Grade 11 and matric was the determination to prove to myself that my setbacks would not define my future. I remembered everything I had already survived and realized I couldn't give up after coming so far. My family's support and my dreams for a better future motivated me to keep pushing forward.

The Year I Thought Was a Setback

After matric in 2024, taking an unplanned gap year was difficult emotionally because it wasn't part of my original plan. I felt uncertain about my future and struggled with anxiety and self-doubt. However, during that time I learned a lot about myself, became more independent, and slowly started seeing the gap year as an opportunity for growth rather than failure.

AND Then, China

I decided to apply to study in China because I wanted a fresh start and a chance to challenge myself beyond my comfort zone. I wanted to experience a different culture, grow as a person, and create new opportunities for my future. The hardest part about adjusting to life in China was feeling isolated because of the language barrier and cultural differences.

Everything felt unfamiliar—the food, the lifestyle, and even simple daily interactions.

Social anxiety made it even harder at first, and there were many moments where I felt lonely and overwhelmed. But since adapting to life in China and doing well at university, I've become much stronger and more confident in myself. I've learned how to handle challenges independently and how to embrace discomfort instead of fearing it. I've grown emotionally, mentally, and personally through this experience.



If I Could Go Back

If I could speak to myself back in that hospital bed in Grade 10, I would say:

"This moment will not break you. The pain, fear, and loneliness you feel right now are temporary. One day you'll look back and realize that this experience made you stronger than you ever imagined."

And if there's one thing I hope someone takes from my story, it's this:

Setbacks and difficult moments do not define who you are. Life can change unexpectedly, and sometimes the hardest experiences shape us the most. No matter how lost, afraid, or hopeless someone feels, there is always a way forward. Healing and growth are always possible.



Healing
is not
linear

Give
yourself
grace

GRATITUDE LOOKS DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE.

*Maybe today, it's simply being grateful that you're still here.
And that's enough.*

Healing
is not
linear

Give
yourself
grace

A MOMENT FOR GRATITUDE

When was the last time you stopped and actually noticed the good things?

Not the big things.

The little things.

The person who checked on you.

The meal you enjoyed.

The laugh you didn't expect.

The fact that you woke up today.

The version of yourself that kept going when things were hard.

Take a moment.

What are three things you're grateful for today?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

And one more...

What is something about yourself that you're grateful for?

You don't have to have a perfect life to be grateful for the life you have.



THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIGURE IT OUT ALONE.

Meet SADAG

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) is a South African organisation that provides mental-health information, support and resources to people who may be struggling with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, trauma and other mental-health challenges.

Sometimes you don't know exactly what's wrong. Sometimes you just know that you're not okay. And that's enough reason to reach out. You can speak to trained counsellors, ask for guidance, find support groups, or be connected with resources that can help you take the next step.

NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO?

Mental Health Helpline

☎ 0800 21 22 23

8AM – 8PM

Suicide Crisis Helpline

☎ 0800 567 567

24 HOURS

Cipla Mental Health Helpline

☎ 0800 456 789

SMS: 31393



SADAG also has 180+ free support groups and a Request a Callback from a Counsellor service. ([SADAG](#))

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING RIGHT NOW

Please don't wait until things become unbearable. Talk to someone you trust. Call for support. Ask for professional help. Let someone know what you're carrying. You deserve support before you reach breaking point.

This page is for information and support. If you are in immediate danger, seek emergency assistance in your area.

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is laughing joyfully, her head tilted back and mouth open. She is wearing a strapless, bright yellow, knee-length dress with a subtle floral pattern. She stands in front of a white, draped curtain that fills the background. The overall mood is one of happiness and liberation.

*“Your light was never lost. Life may have dimmed it
for a while , but it never disappeared.”*



ILLUMINATE
her inner light

— THE MENTAL HEALTH MAGAZINE —