

4-18-2017

Jessina Wangui Marenga

Jessina Wangui Marenga
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/stories-2017-spring>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Marenga, Jessina Wangui, "Jessina Wangui Marenga" (2017). *Spring 2017*. 6.
<http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/stories-2017-spring/6>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the stories of andrews at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2017 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Jessina Wangui Marenga



My name is Jessina Wangui Marenga, and I am an African. My mother is from Kenya and my father from Zimbabwe. That makes me African, and I hold that truth near and dear to my heart.

I recently started calling myself a desert baby, because I was born and raised in a semi-arid region. My mum recalls the year of my birth as the hottest ever recorded. I love the heat. My birthday is in October, the peak of the summer season in the South. I grew up in Botswana which is where my parents migrated in the 90s, in search of work. All my memories of Botswana will, therefore, always be in the color of the hot sun.

In 2006, we relocated to South Africa for my mum to complete her master's degree. It was a new land where the other kids looked at me differently because of my darker complexion and apparent accent. I still had a loving sister though and a caring mother. I had all I needed to be the happiest child anyone could ask. So it was that until the age of 11, my life was truly blissful, and I was content in my bubble of school, Mama, Dada, and Maria.

My father was never really in the picture because his work meant he was constantly traveling—or so I thought. Thus, we built our relationship over the phone and occasional visits. I looked forward to those visits with such eagerness and vivid anticipation. I looked forward to seeing him again, and the usual trinket-gift he would bring me. So he became the distant relative who promised gifts in an attempt to win favor. And my mum became the sole provider of basic needs like food, shelter, clothing and education.

In 2009, the year of my 11th birthday, the family dynamic changed in a rather drastic way for me. In my memories, the first event in this 'awakening' was the night I first saw my father abuse my mother. It was at dinnertime and so odd; I did not see it coming as I came face to face with domestic violence. My mother, just like countless other women, had kept all the past problems away from us kids to spare us. Now it was in the open and the abuse deepened and impacted all of us.

In 2012, my father moved out of the house. We would see him only a few more times before September 13, 2014—the day after my sister's birthday and the last day I saw him. Now, nearly three years later, I am still coming to terms with it. I forgave him, and now I am learning to forget. There are occasional tears when I think back to that time, but the pain becomes duller as time passes.

Being the sole provider for two children is a demanding task, but the socioeconomic factors in South Africa at the time made it even more challenging for my mother. We experienced xenophobia in different ways, the most prevalent being the fact that the government refused to continue paying foreign public school teachers, meaning my mother's salary was reduced substantially. Around the same time, the Home Affairs Department lost our immigration papers, making it almost impossible for my mum to find alternative employment. This loss of paperwork has to this day not been resolved.

In 2016, I graduated from high school, and that marked the end of us living in South Africa. There was no future for me there because the government passed a regulation on all universities which did not allow international students to gain acceptance into medical schools. This fact dashed any hopes of continuing to study in South Africa but proved to be a blessing in disguise because I would end up studying abroad here at Andrews.

This challenge, along with fear of my father returning and the environment in the country, made it difficult for us to continue living in South Africa. The only option was to relocate back to Kenya. Now we are learning to live there and be Kenyans in Kenya—natives for the first time. My mother has yet to find a suitable job, and with my sister in Form 2 and me in college, this is a huge financial burden. It was only by selling her property that my mother was able to send me to Andrews University.

I am now finishing my first year at Andrews University. I can say that my life has been good and I know that I am a better person for facing all that I have experienced. I still believe that God has blessed me in the most beautiful ways. My love for learning is a gift that I cherish and I know that I am here at Andrews for a reason. Telling my story and hearing those of others is a privilege and delight. It shows me how God leads in our lives no matter what happens around us. It is only through constant miracles that I am where I am today and that is where my hope for the future lies.