

Life Story of Bongiwe Butini

My name is Bongiwe Adeline Butini. I was born on the 5th of July in 1984 as the last born of five children. I grew up in Namibia Square, a township in Bloemfontein, South Africa. I still live in Namibia Square with my mother, my sister, two nephews and a niece.

My mother was a kitchen girl, earning R 100 per month. My father was a construction worker. When I was 11 years old he left the family.

I would wake up in the morning and go to school without a lunch box and the other children would laugh at me. Sometimes I got two slices of bread and a cup of milk from the school feeding scheme. Sometimes my mother brought some food from where she worked. But sometimes I didn't have anything to eat until the evening.

I went to dumping sites to look for food and clothes and also got clothes from the church.

When my aunt was very sick and no one was there to help her I wanted to become a nurse or a doctor to be able to help people suffering from illness.

What was most painful was, when I went to my father to ask for money to buy things I needed for school or for a school trip in primary school, he never gave me money. He didn't support me, but only his new girlfriend and her daughter who was in the same class as me.

She would come up to me and tell me that she got the money for the school trip from my father. Then I decided that I wanted to be a social worker to help children who couldn't be supported by their families. But that never happened for me.

I went to Vulamasango High School in Bloemfontein until Grade 12 but did not pass my matric and couldn't re-write the exams because I had to help my mom with the income.

My mother got a pension but by the second week of the month we didn't have anything left to eat. I applied for lots of jobs but never found a job.

I eventually found myself in taverns and clubs where men would give me money for drinks and I would keep the change. I used to do that every weekend. I spent the money that I got to buy groceries for my family. I drank so that I did not have to think of my problems and worries.

In 2007 my father got very sick with HIV-AIDS and TB. He got a sick pension. He was staying with his girlfriend. They didn't have a funeral policy.

In March 2008 my father moved to the house he had inherited from his mother because his girlfriend had kicked him out. But the change of ownership for the house hadn't been finalized yet. My father's cousin asked to stay with him until she would find a place to stay.

In October 2008 my father passed away. I didn't have the money to bury him and the municipality helped me to pay for the funeral. I had to sell my father's fridge to pay for the funeral.

After the funeral my father's cousin kept living in the house and rented the rooms without telling me and refused to let me live in the house that I then inherited from my father.

I couldn't pay a lawyer so my father's cousin still lives in my father's house.

I now am part of 'NABS Unite Community Social Group'.

I work in partnership with the University of the Free State in the 'Trauma, Forgiveness & Conciliation Unit' and we are doing a project about the changes in society 'Post Democracy of 1994'.

Another project for 2014 is in the pipeline: 'Picture Voice'