

SEX FOR EDUCATION: NO EASY ROAD

A Memoir

Rosette Nsonga



A true story about the struggle for success



1.0 INTRODUCTION

This is a true story about my life from childhood. A tale of my birth in the picturesque area of Namalenya village, Nawandhuki parish, Buwunga sub county. in Bugiri District, Eastern Uganda, Africa.

My tale takes you through the changing seasons of my life and my beloved homeland, from a haven of peace into a place of pain and turbulence. This is a journey that takes one to extremes. It is a love story and ultimately a story of the dawn at the end of a dark night; a tale of hope through humility, and victory through faith.

I used to believe that the story of my life was embarrassing and something to keep to myself, and that it would be enough just to tell it to my children and grandchildren, if God gave me the opportunity to live long enough. Nevertheless, the memoir you are reading now comes from a change of mind which brought me to the conviction that one person's story can be an inspiration to generations of people whom that person could not personally talk to, or influence in any other way.

My focus in this story is on girl children wishing to score higher and move faster in their education and jobs; this therefore means that my target audiences are youth, parents, educators, and all leaders at different levels, because the concerns of girl children are the concerns of a nation.

My story illustrates the fact that not every fall means failure, and no success comes on a silver plate. There is no life without setbacks; what matters is how one reacts when faced with challenges, betrayals, abandonment or any other problem. One's attitude is key in all situations. I am the founder and Executive Director of the Organization for Capacity Building Initiative (OCABI). I am schooled, travelled, a mother, wife, farmer and business woman. I bring you here my educational journey and how I managed to sail past the setbacks I have faced.

My prayer is that the story you are about to read will be an encouragement to you as you struggle to achieve your goals.

Buy a leaf

Nsonga Rosette



2.0 Childhood

Born on the 27th/February/1969 in the small village of Namalenya along the Kenya Rwanda Highway in Bugiri District, I am the last child in a family of 14 children. I was born to Nsonga Joseph, a Muluhia of Kenyan origin, and Athieno Josephine, a Luo also of Kenyan origin.

Although my mother did not know the exact day she gave birth to me, she was sure that I was born on a Sunday; and that on the following Sunday, I was baptized by Father Vandalal, a white man. Thus, based on the date on my Baptism card, I counted backward and settled on 27th February 1969, as my birthday.

In 1974, my elder brother Paul Othieno, who was working with the Uganda Electricity Board, and his wife Ajambo Christine, had their first born, a baby girl who was named Nabwire Jenifer. My brother then opted to bring me to Kampala to babysit their daughter. On the other hand, his wife also brought her brother and sister to do the same. Little did I know that that was the beginning of my fate.

My brother did not know that his wife was not in favor of bringing me to live in their home. She began mistreating me without my brother's knowledge. Although I was younger than her relatives, I was forced to do all the housework, while her relatives amused themselves listening to music on a record player, the then-powerful music system usually owned by well-to-do people. But because I was young, and also because I had never mopped a house in my life—I had previously lived only in grass-thatched houses—I did not know how to clean well. That meant that I was beaten every day for my failures as a housekeeper. As if that was not enough, I was also expected to wash dishes, which had to be done in a sink; but because I too small to reach the sink, I could only do the job by taking the dishes out of the sink to wash on the ground, or by standing on a stool to balance over the sink as I washed the plates. However, when my brother's wife caught me doing that, it meant another thorough beating and no food.

To make matters worse, whenever my brother was away I was not given “matooke”—bananas, rice and meat, chicken or fish. My brother's wife would tell me to mash my own posho and groundnut soup, a traditional Luo food she thought I was accustomed to eating because my mother was a Luo. She would make fun of me, calling me “jaluo” and laughing as her sister and brother did the same. She would not allow me to sit inside the house or eat in the dining area; she always told me to sit outside or in the kitchen alone while they ate inside. I was only allowed to sit inside the house in the presence of my brother and that meant I could only eat inside and share a similar meal with everybody during supper when my brother was around. To make matters worse, she did not allow me to talk to my brother and she always told me that if I told my brother what had transpired during the day, she would beat me to death. That meant that I had to keep everything to myself in fear of death.



As time passed, I thought more and more about my mother and my family in general, but I did not know what to do, because I could not even remember the location of my village or how to return home.

2.1 My return to the village

On a day just like any other day, I woke up in the morning and went to wash plates in the kitchen. Little did I know that it would be a life changing day. As I climbed on the stool to put a plate in the sink after rinsing, it fell down and broke. I started crying, knowing that now I would be beaten. My brother came out and found me crying. He asked me what had happened, and I told him that the plate had broken. He simply told me to throw it away and went back into the house. I thought the problem had ended there. To my surprise, during lunch time when my brother's wife was mashing posho for his favorite meal, she asked me to bring her the broken plate, since this was the plate she normally served her husband on. I told her what had happened and said that my brother had told me to throw the plate away.

The next day, when I awoke in Nsambya hospital, in pain and with my head wrapped in bandages, I learned from my brother that his wife had beaten me unconscious with the mashing stick she'd been using to prepare his posho. She had also burned my forehead. After two days my mother came with my other brother Lucas to take care of me, until I was discharged. On leaving the hospital, I realized I no longer had any hair; the nurses had shaved my whole head, "Shauline" style, as it was called in those days. We then went straight to the village. I had sworn never to go to Kampala city again because in my young mind, I now associated Kampala with my mistreatment.

3.0 My Primary Education

In 1976, my mother took me to Busowa Primary School, near my home. When I started my schooling, the other pupils would tease me, calling me "kapaata," which meant "bald head;" my hair had still not grown back on my forehead, where my skin had been badly burned by my sister-in-law. This made me cry and fight whoever would insult me. As time passed, I was too demoralized to go to school due to such insults. Then my mother sat me down and told me that for me to manage those who would insult me, I should work hard and ensure that I beat them in class. Then they would be embarrassed that the one they called "kapaata" had beaten them. I grew up loving my mother and so took all she told me verbatim. I stopped fighting at school and concentrated on reading and doing all my teachers wanted me to do. Surprisingly, I rose to number one in the class by the end of the term, and my teacher Mrs. Isabirye praised me in front of the whole class. When I went home, on seeing my report card, my mother gave me a chicken



to slaughter and eat as a gift; she also gave me a chick to rear as my own. That motivated me so much that I never became discouraged again, and I maintained the same position at the top of my class for three terms. As always, at the end of the term, my mother rewarded me with a chicken. Amidst all my newfound happiness, little did I know that a more difficult fate still awaited me.

One evening, my father came back from the fields, where he had gone to pick cotton, feeling unwell; he did not eat supper with us. He told my mother that somebody (name withheld) had come to assist him in picking cotton. He had also given him some “Waragi,” a local fermented beverage. After my father drank the brew, his stomach had started to hurt. The next morning, my mother did not go to the fields. This was unusual. Instead, she called for a nurse, who came to treat my father at home. We continued with the normal daily work but my father did not get out of bed. After lunch, my mother, looking restless, told us to go and call our aunt Ajwang Demitila and two neighbours. Shortly after, I saw them carry my father from his bed. They lay him down on top of another mattress. My mother ran out crying, and eventually everybody started crying too, saying my father had died and that he had been poisoned. I will never forget this day; it is etched in my memory, because we began our school holidays on December 2nd, 1976, and he died the following day: December 3rd, 1976.

1977 was a year full of sorrow for our family; as per tradition, my mother had to wake up every day at dawn to weep for him, retracing the routes her husband took to the fields, then to the trading centre where he used to go to shop and drink with his friends, before returning home and beginning her own work in the fields. This tormented me so much, since I could not imagine that my father would never come back.

As per the tradition among Samias and many other African tribes, my mother had to be remarried to the brother of her husband-heir; he was called Orumb Mathew. Contrary to the ideal, which was that our paternal relatives would take care of my mother and her children, they were more interested in dividing up my father’s wealth, including cows, goats, sheep, land and two bicycles. They decided to sell the land and agreed that a portion would be left for my two brothers who were already married. The cows would also be sold, and the money divided among my father’s uncles and two elder brothers. They decided that my mother and the four of us who were still in school: Mary Allowo, who was undertaking a tailoring course, John Owino, who was in seventh grade of primary school, Christine Ajambo, who was in sixth, and I, who had just started second grade, were to go with our uncle to Kenya to begin a new life, as he said that he had enough land to build a home for our mother and settle her with his other wives.

My mother and my brother Lucas ran to the Sub-county chief; he gave them a letter to go to Court and an injunction was put on the land (preventing it from being sold?). From that time onward, my paternal uncles and my elder brother Paul vowed never to support my mother and the rest of us. This marked the beginning of a time of great turmoil for our family, because there



was nothing to depend on beyond the land, which we worked using hand hoes alongside our mother.

3.1A Bumpy Road to An Education

Life became increasingly difficult, as we children worked alongside our mother, doing subsistence farming and supporting her small brewing business, in order to survive. My sisters and brother dropped out of school. I remained in school until the end of my seventh-grade primary year, and at the end of term, I learned that I had passed –and had been admitted to Tororo Girls boarding school. However, I could not afford to go. After missing the first term, I was nominated for a government scholarship in day school 5 kilometers away from home. That meant that I had to travel 10 kilometers daily to and from classes. During my third year of studies, the ruling government was overthrown; luckily enough, the school continued to provide me with a scholarship until I completed my fourth year, with second grade honors. However, the day school did not offer advanced grades, and thus in order to continue, I had to go to another school called Wairaka College in Jinja District.

My mother worked hard at her brewing business, struggling to make enough money to raise my school fees. I joined senior five, which I completed very well, and joined senior six. After only one term in senior six, however, the school fees were raised. My mother, struggling though she was to make a success of her business, could not afford the increased fees. That meant that I could not continue with my education.

4.0 The fall

Around that time, I had become involved with an older businessman. Knowing my desire to study, he used the situation to confuse me. He said he would pay my overdue school fees and continue to support my education if I agreed to have a relationship with him. I was an innocent virgin, and because I desperately wanted to go to school, I fell for his tricks. I foolishly agreed to sleep with him. Unfortunately, the man did not pay my school fees. I got pregnant quickly, but did not tell my mother. When I told the man, he denied responsibility. Later he gave me money, told me to get an abortion, and warned me never to look for him again. I was so scared, and I cried for days. But after giving it a lot of thought, I decided to lie to my mother; I asked her to give me the money she had saved, so that I could go to the school and plead to be readmitted in order to register for final exams, even though I had missed a full term. She agreed, and when she gave me the money, I added what the man had given me to pay for an abortion and used the funds to go back to school. By that time, I was six months pregnant, but I was the only one who



knew it. Though I was pregnant, I vowed to one-day graduate from college and become a professional woman, in order to support my mother.

The school allowed me to register; shortly after, final exams were held. However, because I had missed almost two terms, I didn't earn high enough grades to enter university. I nonetheless qualified for admission to a teacher's diploma course. By the time exam results were released, I had a three months old baby boy named Donald Mugeni. My mother opted to take care of the baby and I began my studies at the National Teachers College Nagongera.

In 1993 I completed my diploma. I was posted to Busia Senior Secondary School, where I taught English Language and Literature in English until April 1996.

5.0 The Dawn of Good Fortune

One day, while I was in the staff room, I read a newspaper called New Vision. It contained a job advertisement placed by the Foundation for International Community Assistance Uganda (FINCA Uganda). They were seeking to hire "community mobilizers," a job title that was later changed to credit officers. I applied for the position, and in two weeks I was called for an interview.

22 candidates had been selected, and yet they only wanted to hire six people. I left everything to God. The interview was conducted by FINCA's director, an American woman named Emmy Davis, and the program manager, Edith Mulyanga. After the interview, candidates were told to call or come by the office on Thursday to find out the results. And so, on Thursday, I went to the post office to call FINCA—mobile phones were still not in common use. I gave the telephone operator the number and in a second the call went through to the receptionist. As soon as I said, "I am Rosette, calling from Busia," she shouted "Rosette, congratulations, you were the best in the interview. Come pick up your appointment letter!!" I shouted in response, and shed tears of joy, disbelief, and gratitude to God.

From the post office, I went home and prepared to leave for Jinja to pick up my appointment letter. I reached Jinja when the office was about to close, but I hastily introduced myself and was given a package at the reception. On opening and reading it, I wondered at God's miracles: as a teacher, I was earning 53,000 shillings per month, and now I was going to earn 250,000 monthly—plus a 35,000 shillings monthly field allowance, as well as a transportation allowance. I was to start work in two weeks' time. I vowed that the first beneficiary of my salary would be my mother; and as soon as I could, I began construction on a semi-permanent house for her (shown below).





At FINCA I advanced through the ranks from credit officer, to credit supervisor, acting training manager and finally to regional operations manager for Eastern Uganda. However, I continued to pursue my dream of eventually earning a university degree. When I was transferred to FINCA's head office in Kampala City in 1998, near Makerere University, I enrolled for an evening program. I finally graduated in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences.

6.0 Life lessons

Through my experiences, I learned the hard way that I had to work hard to provide a comfortable life for myself. After all I had been through, I did not see a good reason to get into another relationship.

Reflecting on my mother's experience, and on the hardships experienced by her children, I have also come to believe that the establishment of laws to protect women's property and land after the death of their spouses should be given priority. I would not have suffered to such an extent if my mother's marital property had not been divided among my father's relatives. I am not alone in this belief; the 2011 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey and the 2007 Uganda Gender Policy and National Development Plan both recognize that discrimination against women in Uganda results from traditional rules and practices that explicitly exclude women or give preference to men, and that this discrimination serves as a key constraint on women's empowerment and economic progress in my country. I have also come to believe that girls should learn to be patient, committed and hard working. I should have persevered in helping my mother grow her homebrew business—even if that had meant suspending my education for a time—rather than trading sex for school fees. But when I slept with the man who fathered my child, it was because I did not realize that, even at that early stage in my life, I could work and make my own money. I thought I was taking an easy way out, but clearly it was not. I eventually discovered that I could provide for myself. This knowledge has given me strength and inspired me to write my story in the hope that other girls might not have to learn this lesson the hard way, as I did.



7.0 Climax

ONCE A DREAM, NOW A REALITY



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