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**Rebuilding Lives:
The strategies of women
survivors of domestic violence**



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Preface

These words of women who have survived violence were distressing and had a profound effect on me. They are also similar to words I have heard in my own country, in Quebec, Canada. Once again they show that the fight of women for their fundamental rights is universal.

These words are not just a courageous act; they are also a political act. These Mozambican women who agreed to testify about their daily horrors – **Linda, Gabriela, Anabela and Julia** – are pioneers on the path of hope. Hope for all women, hope because it is possible to leave a violent relationship and retake control over their lives. As Kate Millet, the American feminist, said more than thirty years ago – what is private is political. By analyzing the private lives of men and women we can understand better the power relationship in society in general, and relations of male domination over women.

Power OVER is the predominant power, whereas the power TO DO is the potential of all human beings to develop and choose their life and their destiny. It is this power TO DO that women are often denied. Violent men no longer know how to communicate; they only know how to give orders. Violence is used to usurp the fruits of women's work, to reduce them to domestic servants who they can order around whenever they want and can make them sexual slaves. Women seeking a harmonious conjugal relationship, who make every effort to combine commitment and concession in order to calm their husbands and put an end to violence, often end up in painful failure. The violence continues, no matter what they do.

These four stories show how the family, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sisters-in-law, friends are too tolerant in the face of domestic violence and these women are asked to continue their sacrifice in order to "save" their marriage and their family's honour. Some have to pay for their "freedom" – must freedom be reduced to the right to not be attacked? – by abandoning their children. Julia, one of the survivors who speak to us in this book, had to choose between remaining with her children or leaving her violent husband. She paid

for the separation, in order to have peace, by leaving her children. Two burdens, two measures, and the aggressor is the winner.

Violent men cannot let their wives have power TO DO. Don't let them have the right to say no, to choose how to spend their time, to negotiate on an equal footing with their companions and their husbands. The four combatants who speak to us in this book clearly show how their husbands invented all kinds of slander, lies and accusations to make them appear incapable and shameful. This attitude is a flagrant injustice and provokes revolt among women who have been violated, as would happen to any sane person. Violent men weave a spider's web around their victims, a web that ends up immobilizing the victim if she is unable to get away in time. Women who have been traumatized and immobilized by violence will bear the psychological effects for the rest of their lives. The violated women who managed to survive paid a heavy price for society's tolerance of the open violation of their most basic rights, such as the simple right to be respected and not to endure violence. Indeed, we should not forget that many women do not survive violence, are brutally murdered by their violent husbands. Mozambique has no figures on women who are killed by their husbands or a member of their family, although the tabloid press report dozens of cases a year, and this is clearly just the tip of the iceberg.

Thanks to feminist organizations more or less throughout the world, and here in Mozambique thanks to WLSA, abuse of power in the form of domestic violence is being denounced and is becoming the subject of public debate. *Forum Mulher* has just concluded a draft law, a progressive and necessary proposal, against domestic violence. As in other parts of the world, in Mozambique mentalities are changing but the path and the struggle will be a long one. If we are to change the male-female relationship of domination we must abandon the legacy of the past, that often means violence and the oppression of women and in general all those who are considered weaker and inferior. This social order, that confers many privileges and benefits for those who dominate others, must change.

I would like to end this preface with the words of a man, Daniel Welzer-Lang, a French anthropologist who has studied at length the relationships between men and women and their roles in daily life: "Male domination is not a radical

feminist theory. It is a social reality, a brutal fact. The violence that men use to maintain their privileges is not an invention. But men are not born violent, they become violent. Domestic violence is a social gangrene (not a personal failing) born of this still legitimized domination, this artificial superiority of men over women. We must ask ourselves if we want to live differently. With regard to not only relations between men and women but also relations between men.”¹

Yes, it is possible to live differently. This is what Linda, Gabriela, Anabela and Júlia who are present in this book fervently wish. Listen to them.

Sylvie Desautels

Feminist and supporter of the cause of Mozambican women, who has lived in Mozambique for 12 years.

Maputo June 2006

¹ Daniel Welzer-Land, quoted by Ariane Emond, *Les ponts d'Ariane*, Ed. VLB, Quebec, 1994, p.83.

Introduction

Talking about marginal lives and subjects

Violence against women has become an essential topic for public debate due in particular to the combined effects of national and international women's movements. Following the 1995 Beijing Conference and the government's ratification of the main international legal instruments that defend women's human rights, the existence of domestic violence cannot be denied. This is despite various arguments that try to water down its significance, that try to deny that it is a form of structural violence linked to the patriarchal system and male domination.

This book, containing the life histories of women who have survived domestic violence, arises from a project linked to the second phase of a research project on Violence Against Women conducted by WLSA Mozambique in 2004-2005². Rather than attempting to confirm the research results the aim is to give violence “a human face”, to show that victims are more than just passive agents of a “fate” they cannot resist. On the contrary, the aim is to show women with dreams and concrete projects, women who even when powerless, never stop resisting and developing self preservation strategies. This is why we feel that recording women's biographies and putting together their life histories is a way of improving our understanding of how gender social relations are structured, how social change occurs and how broader social forces impact on the individual. The life histories show how these social forces have a profound influence on shaping subjective experiences and reveal the multiple sources of oppression and privilege in women's lives. For these reasons the research project and this publication

² See M. Mejia, C. Osorio and M.J. Arthur, 2004, Don't Suffer in Silence. Violence against women and children: denunciation and the management of conflicts, Maputo, WLSA Mozambique; M.J. Arthur and M. Mejia, 2006, Courage and Impunity, Maputo, WLSA Mozambique.

have an unmistakable emancipatory nature that is reflected in the title of this book “Rebuilding Lives: the strategies of women survivors of domestic violence”.

We recognise that both the subject and the actors whose voices are presented in this book are marginal to this kind of study. Indeed, although situations vary considerably, even in academic circles violence against women does not have the same “legitimacy” as other study objects. And even though it is now being discussed publicly, albeit discretely, people still avoid mentioning it “too much”.

As regards the actors, we decided to emphasize the ordinary lives of women who have no public visibility, women who although living in difficult circumstances try to regain control over their lives. The aim is to give them a voice and to highlight their experiences. Finally, we are aware that through this exercise we are unearthing and disseminating memories that people usually want to hide and forget. We are challenging habitual or culturally established memory patterns. We do not want to talk about heroic deeds or great achievements, but about women who are trying to survive.

For this reason we emphasise the different kinds of resistance and the wide variety of strategies used by women to avoid violence, to preserve their dignity, to protect their children, in short, to restart their lives. They are not "success histories", just stories of resistance, about the resistance that is possible given the social, cultural and economic situation of each woman. In other words, the aim of this work is to present the social experience of some women; not to capture the essence of a female identity but rather to reveal the dynamic relationship between determination and room for manoeuvre, what they experience and what they feel.

1. The contexts: the social legitimacy of domestic violence

The context of the life stories in this book is the modern day context and they should be interpreted and analysed in this specific historical moment, with its political and social discourse, its family institutions and its gender ideologies.

Violence against women and, more specifically domestic violence, have considerable social legitimacy due to a family ideology that gives the male head of the family the prerogative of using force to resolve marital conflicts and the right to control his wife or companion, her activities, her behaviour and her reproduction. At the local level this position is reinforced by community courts and local structures, by neighbourhood secretaries and social affairs sections that are the closest instances for recourse in cases of domestic conflict.

In the case of the justice administration authorities, although the law states that any kind of physical or psychological aggression is a crime, and additional legislation increases penalties when the aggressor has a close relationship with the victim,³ domestic conflicts are usually still seen, analyzed and judged as "social cases". From the policeman to the judge, the conduct of the actors that administer justice is manifestly ambiguous, lying as it does between the legal imperative and social ideologies about violence against women, about the family and about gender hierarchies. This means that only a minute proportion of the complaints by the victims of domestic violence presented to police stations are passed on to competent authorities such as the Criminal Investigation Police or the Public Prosecutor (Mejia et al., 2004) Only a minute fraction of the husbands or partners who assault women are punished.

³ The Penal Code in force at the time this book was published and Law 8/2002. The Penal Code is being revised and a law against domestic violence is being drafted and should be submitted to the Parliament this year.

The creation of Offices for Women and Children Victims of Violence in police stations has improved substantially the response and treatment of domestic violence complaints. However, these offices face various constraints that prevent them from creating more effective conditions, let alone ensuring that the law will be applied or that violence in a relationship will cease, which is what women who are sufficiently courageous to denounce their aggressors expect.

The Forensic Medicine services, that should provide clinical evidence of assault in such cases, are very weak. Many criminal cases are purely and simply closed for lack of evidence.

The profile of the victims of violence (Arthur and Mejjia, 2005) shows that women who denounce and make a complaint do so only when they consider it to be socially acceptable. Under these circumstances, they complain to the police about non payment of maintenance for under-age children, abandoning the family and extreme violence. "Small" episodes of daily violence are not even considered a crime, and are only detected when the victims make a statement.

Women who make a formal complaint also face great hostility from the relatives of their husband or partner, who consider such behaviour an outrage against the family and the authority and dignity of their relative. This hostility can be translated into threats and physical aggression, isolation or denying access to resources. There is almost always a subsequent rise in violence by the aggressor. He feels offended by police intervention in what he considers to be a private matter and justifies his behaviour by referring to the socially accepted roles of women and men and a "man's responsibilities" within the family. Their discourse reflects the prevailing social order and is an important indicator for understanding how domestic violence is perceived and managed throughout the country.

Victims receive no support, neither psychological treatment nor shelter, even when their physical integrity and that of their children are at risk. The social assistance services do not have the capacity to respond to these cases.

Efforts to record data on domestic violence complaints in police stations only started in 2004. Moreover, it is well known that the number of women who denounce violence is only a minute proportion of those living in a violent relationship.

When reconstructing life histories, care must be taken to ensure that the contexts are taken into account. From the subject's viewpoint, they are a frame of reference that enables them to understand the world, position themselves in it and give meaning to their lives. From the reader's viewpoint, they are crucial for interpreting how individuals position themselves in the relationships and the structures that make up their worlds. In this sense, "the context is not a guide but a dynamic process through which the individual configures and is configured by the environment" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 19) through various networks and through current and passed forms of belonging. When the complex contexts are taken into account they reveal the varied experiences of women's lives and their expectations.

To the extent that each individual represents her own culture and her own time, behaviour, choices and strategies must always be viewed in the light of the subject and her social context (Galán, 1996). In other words, we are talking about *habitus*, the subject's disposition to act, understand and think. The attempt to understand the lives being portrayed is important for getting to know social and political factors and for identifying "the horizon of significance" (Carvalho, 2003) of the narratives. It is this that gives meaning to the "interplay" between the privacy of an agent and the socio-historical space of her existence. Although the agent always has the possibility of choice, the range of choices available to her must be seen in the light of time and space.

2. Some comments on the construction of life histories

The term "life history" is ambiguous and implies various possibilities. It can refer to autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, confessions or apologia. It is applicable to any kind of personal document containing information on the life being studied. In our opinion and in the specific case of this study, we interpret "life history" in its narrow sense, where a woman recounts her own life. It differs from an autobiography in two aspects: the way it is constructed, and the initiative.

As regards construction, and as emphasized by Galán (1996), a "life history" is based on a person's own account and is the result of an initiative by another person, usually the researcher. For this reason it requires the presence of a social scientist who requests the author to tell her history, a history that she would not otherwise have told, memoirs she would not have written. In other words, they are autobiographical interviews because the life history is a montage by the researcher. Consequently, we feel that the life history "is an autobiographical account obtained by the researcher through successive interviews where the objective is to reveal a person's subjective account, where both events and her evaluation of her own existence are gathered" (Pujadas, 1992, cited by Garrido and Olmos, 1998⁴).

We did not want to write biographies, with external researchers interpreting the subject's experience from an outsider's viewpoint, interpreting the subject's experience based on her personal accounts and evidence gathered from documentary sources or from other individuals nearby. In other words, we had to decide whether to work with a single voice or whether we would seek other subjects nearby in order to rebuild the context and cross check information.

⁴ Joan Pujadas Muñoz, 1992, *El método biográfico: el uso de las historias de vida en las ciencias sociales*. Madrid, CIS.

We soon discarded this possibility because, given our objectives, we were not really interested in verifying the truth of the facts, but rather the way they were/are felt by the subject. For this reason, we have not drawn any conclusions. We invite the readers to form their own opinions, in particular on how social agents find various ways of retaking control over their lives or at least of avoiding even greater misfortune.

Consequently, the life histories in this book try to provide the authors'/narrators' perspective and, to the extent possible, it is up to the reader to reinterpret what is said. Of course interference by the interviewer cannot be avoided, and for this reason we shall later discuss in detail the process used to gather and construct the accounts. It was this perspective that guided our work and about which we would like to make some initial comments.

We shall first look at the narrators as the project arose because of them. Some authors have called attention to the fact that the interpretation and construction of life histories should be aware of the so-called "autobiographical ideology". Sometimes the narrator unconsciously reorganizes her own experience and presents the film of her life in a different sequence. (Poirier, Clapier-Valadon and Raybaut, 1983: 43) They warn that this reorganization of reality is particularly false and artificial as it usually eliminates the most disagreeable parts, and accentuates factors of coherence, the "unit of life" as opposed to the a-coherence of diversity, of eventual contradictions.

Given our objectives, we are interested in the reconstruction itself, as it reveals priorities and interpretations of the past that depend on a combination of factors - among others, distance from the narrated facts, the present situation and the context in which the story is told. In this subjective reconstruction of the experience (as the object of the study) we do not lose sight of the fact that it is a construction that reveals the society and culture that produced it and that reproduces itself through it.. The underlying notion here is that experience in itself, the individual experience, is also the result

of a social process. Moreover, “in the past there is no fixed significance” (Carvalho, 2003) and this is valid for all the subjects involved in reconstructing their memories. In our case, the way a woman decides to present her past is in itself very significant. For example, the agents’ choice of where to start the autobiographical narrative is already an indication of how each woman is interpreting her past. And, as we shall see later, the life histories presented in this book seek to retain the sequence in which their authors told them.

Related to this aspect, another common question is how to ensure that what is said by the respondents is the truth. For the Personal Narratives Group (1989:201-203) the essential question is knowing “what truth do we mean when we talk about truth?” That is, they refuse to consider only one truth or “the” truth and feel that reductionist approaches only produce the “truth” in terms of factual precision, the representativity of social circumstances or the reliability of the subject’s memory when tested against “objective” sources. On the contrary, they defend truth as a concept that must be used in the plural, in order to cover the many different ways in which life histories reflect awareness of the experience and the social environment of the agent herself, thereby creating her own essential reality. They believe that when people talk about their lives they sometimes change some facts, forget certain passages, exaggerate or become confused. Nevertheless, they are revealing truths, even though these cannot be confirmed factually or by other evidence. But they can be understood, taking into account the context and the visions of the world that lie behind their creation. Consequently, instead of labelling a history as false or true, they defend the need to try to understand why the narrator is telling the history in this way and not in another way. Learning truths in the plural means emphasizing the particular and denying generalizations: the generalization of “the” truth serves as a control mechanism, controlling information, controlling irregularities in human experience, controlling what is knowledge.

Using this approach in our project, we tried to ensure that the emphasis was on the experience of the narrator, “the source and the possibility of the

narrative” (Carvalho, 2003). The subject telling the history must be the author and interpreter of its meaning, she must relive and recreate what she experienced.

A third aspect that must be taken into account is the role of the interviewer and, more specifically, the relationship between the person being interviewed and the interviewer. When autobiographical narratives are not the result of the authors’ initiative, an intermediary must always be present; someone with a variety of functions: promoter, coordinator and moderator. This has been called the "autobiographical relationship" (Poirier, Clapier-Valladon and Raybaut, 1983: 40) and refers to the specific relationship that arises between the speaker and interviewer, and that can give rise to many different positions.

In other words, the production of personal narratives is the result of a time and a space where the informant and the researcher interact. In these cases the main concern is: "Which history is being told? Which voice is being heard?" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). In other words, how to ensure that interference by the interviewer does not adulterate or affect the narrative according to his/her interests or his/her personal visions? Fully aware of these constraints, to the extent possible we tried to avoid the role of "interpreters", so that the voices of the survivors could reach their public directly. Of course, given what has already been said, it was impossible to avoid some interference, such as encouragement to talk about their lives, presence and interaction during the narrative, the way the women were encouraged to talk and, no less important, our options in the final structuring of the narrative, that is discussed below.

Still on the subject of the interviewer-narrator relationship, the power relationship established between them and the reality and situation of inequality that affect and involve most of the work, must be taken into account. As pointed out by the Personal Narratives Group (1989), the most obvious inequalities are: literate/illiterate, poverty/economic security, third world/first world, experience lived/experience as the subject of research.

We must be aware of these inequalities and try to establish a more ethical and egalitarian relationship, where the relationship of exploitation is replaced by one of reciprocity, and highlights the way the interviewer influences the narrative. There is a "sympathetic comprehension" that assumes knowledge through reciprocity between I and the Other, in such a way that the autobiographical interview is linked to the life of the woman who is learning about it and passing on the information to others. There are no objective approaches as counterweights to subjective approaches. Intermediation, the very act of interviewing, is immediately included in the experience of the subject being studied.

So the researcher is an active participant, involved in the configuration of a personal narrative in a variety of ways. B. Bozzoli (1985) summarizes this issue succinctly: "It is the intimacy that develops between interviewer and subject that constitutes the most fruitful and creative aspect of this work". In short, researcher and researched, each representing her culture, come face to face in the social relationship that supports the research.

3. Collecting information

The collection of the life histories for this study was structured around what Born (2001) calls "institutional regulation" i.e. through the family or through work that intervenes to structure the course of a life. Given current gender hierarchies and inequalities, regulation is different for a woman and a man. Institutional regulation makes it possible to draw up a "normal biography" covering the predictable "fate" of a given agent in a specific social location. The challenge will be to find the "deviations" and the possibility of divergence from this model.

Consequently, the first structural feature of the life histories was life cycles, namely: i) childhood, ii) before marriage, iii) after marriage. We tried to

understand how gender relations are felt and structured in each of these phases. We wanted to see how the narratives configured and expressed their entire life, their actions and social contexts; the significance given to important events and events that marked the course of their personal lives.

A second structural feature was work, both domestic and paid, as the latter is extremely important as an exclusive area of self-achievement, an area that links a person's values to her work. We wanted to find out how having a job structured/was structured in each phase of life and influenced decision-making capacity, access to resources and options in life.

Another structuring feature was reproduction, where we tried to find out the special way that reproductive capacity, reproductive work and the subsequent organization of the family, shape and conform to gender relations in the family and between the couple.

Finally, we wanted to incorporate the respondents' violent relationship(s) into the specific personal context of each woman.

3.1 Comments on the people interviewed

The four survivors whose life stories are presented here were selected with the help of the survey's key informants. We were looking for women who had experienced violent relationships and who at that time were seeking a new direction or who had definitively overcome that phase in their lives. So although we wanted to find anonymous women, this was not always possible because some of the suggestions we received concerned women who were well known locally. In two cases they were people close to the research who had volunteered statements, either because they thought that their autobiography would be of interest, or because they needed to talk and in this way exorcise some of the worst moments of their lives. Later, during the study, this last hypothesis seemed the most probable.

One initial concern when we started the interviews was to ensure that the central objective was clear, that of producing an account that could be a source of comfort and inspiration for other women who were victims of domestic violence, and as a way of encouraging them to denounce their aggressors, and to make decision makers more aware of the problem. However, they themselves had various reasons for telling us about their lives, ranging from pride in overcoming the problem or merely having survived difficult situations and great violence, to the desire to show other women that it is possible to retake the initiative in conducting their lives, and even to the need to talk about it. The four survivors interviewed see themselves as oppressed, as is clearly evident from their stories.

Another criterion in the choice of informants was that they should speak Portuguese so that another intermediary would not be required in the process and it would be possible to build a one-to-one relationship between the interviewer and the interviewed.

But above all, one of the initial concerns was an ethical question: on the one hand how to avoid putting excessive strain on the survivors, and on the other hand how to emancipate them. In other words, how to make the experience of autobiographical interviews a way of affirming and consolidating their self-esteem, giving them power not in a paternalistic way but through empowerment. We thought that talking about conflicts that had been resolved and that had not been resolved, and the possibility of talking not only about facts but also feelings and state of mind, could help them to retain their identity and strengthen their options. For this it was important to guarantee an open, transparent and non-hierarchical relationship with the informants, letting them know that they could intervene at any time during the process and in the production of the final published account.

The main commitment in our agreement with the survivors who agreed to tell us their life was anonymity. In order to preserve this, not only did we change their name but also those of people mentioned during their accounts. This also meant that we had to exclude certain episodes that, in order to be

understood, needed personal details that could reveal the identities that we wanted to preserve.

The construction of the life histories was a long and difficult process. Long because we had to proceed step by step, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the research to meet the people to be interviewed. We started with autobiographical interviews, where we tried to simultaneously respect personal priorities in sequencing and the subjects covered, while at the same time trying to ensure that the account would be comprehensive to others. Being comprehensible meant not only the sequence of events but the reasons for one or another choice, the motives behind certain life options. For this reason each of the four stories begins with a different focus, based on different phases of life.

The interviews took place in protected locations free of any interference from other people. And although our research team had two members, the work with survivors was done individually.

The interview guides were discussed in advance with the authors, and it was made clear that the sequencing and order of events depended entirely on each person. It was also agreed that our intervention should be limited to occasional requests for clarification, which in no way meant that they were obliged to reply when they did not want to. Each interview ended with a summary and the preparation of the next phase. The amount of time spent with each survivor ranged from 7 to 12 hours divided into various interviews, in addition to informal meetings and exchanges of opinions. All the conversations were taped, except for some intimate passages which the informants thought we should know so that we could better understand certain episodes, but where there was common agreement that they should not be included in the final account.

The next phase in the process was to transcribe the tapes respecting the vocabulary used, the conversation style and the emphasis placed on certain

passages. This was followed by the construction of a single account that observed certain criteria.

Firstly, as in the case of the interviews, the survivors' account should be written in the first person, the figure of the interviewer should not appear. This had the advantage of minimizing interference with the text, leaving the interviewee to address the eventual reader directly, even though it has been pointed out that the advantage of dialogue is that it restores the presence of the researcher and shows interaction (Caplan, 1997: 9-14).

As already mentioned, the second criterion was the elimination of passages and episodes that might reveal the identity of the survivors and the people they mentioned. Thirdly, we eliminated parts of the interviews that were repeated not once but several times and that usually covered the most traumatic episodes of violence. The final result was intended to capture the essential phases of their lives, with special emphasis on the survivors' view of the world and their expectations.

During this phase we worked with the authors to ensure that the published account lived up to their expectations. At this point the content and the order of the information given could still be altered, or new data could be added. In addition, of course, it was accepted that the author could change her mind and decide not to publish anything.

The final work session involved reading the final account together in order to revise the content, language styles and to obtain their general impressions about the text. In four cases the version presented was approved with a few changes, mainly to clarify certain situations. In two cases there was a post script due to the length of time between the initial interviews and this final stage.

Finally, as already mentioned, the process itself was difficult. Even though we were always aware that the opportunity of talking about their lives would be important for women survivors of domestic violence, when we

started we had no idea how much they and we would get so involved in this process. The laughter and the pride in what was being described were followed by tears. In particular, two very recent cases produced moments of great emotion and we had to interrupt the work for fear of doing some harm. Even though our interviewees were willing to continue, we were afraid that obliging them to recall the difficult moments they had experienced would upset the already delicate equilibrium they had managed to achieve in their lives and set off a process of victimisation. The possibility of this risk has been emphasised by feminist researchers working in this field (Skinner, Hester & Malos, 2005).

It was at this point in our work that we decided to consult a psychiatrist. We told her about the project, the methods used and the interaction and asked for her advice as to whether or not we should continue. Based on her suggestions we decided to continue with the interviews but always taking care to assure ourselves that continuing was in the survivors' best interest. Sometimes we restarted at the initiative of the author herself, as there was almost a kind of compulsion to talk. Similar experiences with people suffering from trauma have shown that autobiographical narratives can be therapeutic (Smith & Watson, 2001: 21-23). Consequently, when we saw that many of them were talking about their problems for the first time, whenever we concluded the taped sessions we carried on chatting and encouraged them to talk so they could get things off their chest. We were reminded of a passage from a novel where various women victims of violence meet each other: "We introduced ourselves, we knew each other. We each poured out our pain like water from a cup and each time I told my history I lost a drop of suffering".

Finally, we wish to emphasize that this book will not be put on sale. As WLSA Mozambique is a non-profit publisher it will be distributed in the same way as the other materials produced by the organization, and this was explained to the authors.

3.2 Our reasons for doing this work

Although the idea of collecting the life histories of women survivors of domestic violence was conceived very early on in our work, our personal motivation got stronger and stronger. From the end of 2004 and throughout 2005 we worked in three provinces, interviewing victims of violence, aggressors, the relatives of both, police officials and representatives of community structures involved in resolving domestic conflicts. Throughout that time not only did we encounter situations of extreme violence, some of which resulted in femicide, but also situations where the aggressors went unpunished for a variety of reasons, ranging from the values and ideological systems that legitimate this kind of domestic violence to the inadequacy of the law and the justice administration where this kind of offence is not considered a crime.

In addition, at the same time we also participated in the preparation of a new law against domestic violence to be submitted to the government by civil society organisations. This process, that tried to involve representatives of various sectors in the country, was extremely frustrating. We found that the agents (both male and female) who should be most sensitive to this kind of violence, refused to recognise: i) the structural nature of violence against women; ii) that domestic violence takes shape mainly through men exercising their power over women.

It was clear that they were implicitly defending the counter-arguments presented by patriarchal institutions to avoid acknowledging that this kind of violence is a serious affront to women's human rights. These include: domestic violence can occur in two directions – by men against women and by women against men; what constitutes violence for some women is little more than a manifestation of love and when an aggressor is sorry about what he has done his guilt is less and he should be forgiven; there are limits to public intervention in the home.

These positions reveal not only enormous ignorance of the sociological dimension of the violence against women phenomenon but also the dehumanisation of the victims themselves. Whereas for us the discussion became almost personal, because we saw the faces of the women we met and interviewed and their desperate pleas for help in police stations and from local authorities. While their rights were being discussed, legal systems and the limits of state intervention, they were asking for protection and feared for their lives.

Another activity that aggravated the tension we were experiencing was the dissemination of the results that started as soon as we had concluded our work in the first province. The partial results were presented at various levels with WLSA Mozambique's partner organizations, in training centres for justice personnel and in universities and other more specialist forums that invited us to give a presentation. This experience, especially with university students and the justice system interns, was very painful. While we expected the debate to focus on our theoretical framework, the methodological options and the relevance of the results, the discussion was based on the participants' existing ideas - about gender relations, about the position of women and men – the common ground of domestic violence had to be defended against a backdrop of strong hostility. Each intervention seemed to be more of a battle, where we were crossing swords not about theoretical arguments but about social representations of gender hierarchies and violence against women.

At one point during the research on domestic violence that was taking place simultaneously in the Offices for Women and Children in police stations and through neighbourhood organisations, we realized that we ourselves were being affected by the reports we were hearing. We got very agitated, and showed symptoms such as belligerence and lack of sleep. The final content and form of the project's results reflect this state of mind, and our clear emancipation objectives.

We shall end here and gave the floor to Linda, Gabriela, Anabela and Julia. They come from a variety of different origins and have different expectations about their lives and journeys.

Maria Jose Arthur
Margarita Mejia

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Life story 1

LINDA: I found my strength.

Linda offered to tell her story when she heard that we were looking for women who had lived in violent relationships. The work was done discreetly so that her colleagues and much less her husband would know about it. In order to justify the many weekend hours she spent with us, she told him she had to finish some urgent work. Given the circumstances this was a courageous move, although only one among many others she had had to take during her life.

It is impossible not to like Linda, when seeing how she treats everyone so affectionately and kindly, and we discovered her enormous inner strength. We are extremely grateful for having had the opportunity to work with her.

When she told her story Linda was 45 years old, still married and had three children. She worked to support her home because her husband had been unemployed for many years.

Dating and marriage

I started to go out with my husband when I was 20 or 21. It was simple: he liked me, was very interested, and wanted to get to know me. He went to the place where I was working, the kind of contact you have when you're young. I was already 20 or 21, because I had just been demobilised from obligatory military service. I joined the army when I was 19. Obviously, when I joined the army I didn't have much experience, and love at first sight enchanted me. And I let myself be led astray and got pregnant. I got

pregnant after almost two months, but I had no experience. I was a young girl, and rarely spoke about such things with my girl friends. We only talked about films, stories, gossip, walks, beaches, that kind of thing. Family occasions, picnics. So what could I do, he had more experience than me and I got pregnant. Why it had to be me I don't know. I didn't even know how to tell my parents, how to explain, because I didn't have that kind of open relationship with them, maybe because I was their first daughter. My parents were very strict, and my mother educated me in a completely different way. She always took great care to explain that the first man who really dishonours a girl, is the man she must marry. Because things were like that, that's how people maintained their reputation, especially women. Marriage was the only way.

I remember quite clearly that when I joined the army my parents' main concern was that I was a child. My father was always worried and he was a very strict father who always controlled us, he didn't let us play around, get involved with just any kind of person, we had a very strict upbringing. Then look what happened! My husband is from around here, he also comes from a very large family. He already knew our family, knew that we were many brothers and sisters. And even before we actually met I already knew about him. Because he always had his eye on me, followed me around, tried to find out about me by talking to some of my colleagues at work. Because I started to work when I was still very young, only 17. I used to chat with the other women and got his name from them, but I wasn't interested and didn't even know him. But then there just that fleeting, exciting glance, we knew everybody here in town, then after I got pregnant I tried to find out from him how it had happened.

I started to notice that my trousers didn't fit me anymore; they were too tight, but I didn't know why. I was a girl who had been brought up very strictly. And then there was the environment itself, we were all virgins, you see. We didn't have much contact with boys. Then, after being dishonoured, I got really worried and even said that I wanted to get married. I remember that I cried a lot, I was desperate and a little later he went to my parent's

house. I pressured him into telling my family, going to my father's house, a family is the most important. But my father wouldn't even let him come close, and so some other people outside the family went to talk to my father, but little by little, and very carefully. They asked whether my father knew that family and my father always said no. He said no because one of my father's sister, the youngest one in fact, had been engaged to my husband's brother.

I had no idea that my husband was the brother of my aunt's fiancée. I knew nothing about it, so I was at ease. And when they insisted on presenting themselves, my father swore that he wouldn't receive them. And sometimes my husband deliberately kept me out late. He knew that I had specific timetable that I had to be home by half past five, that my father was very strict with us. Then my husband (at the time he was my boyfriend) instead of taking me home at the right time deliberately took me home late, at half past seven, 8 o'clock, half past eight and that was rude; it showed a lack of principles. Then my father would hit me, hit me, hit me, hit me, and in the middle of all that violence, my father started to hate me. And then my father was drinking a lot. My mother didn't hit me. She was always very kind, because she always said that I was going through a difficult period, but she didn't know that I was pregnant.

My husband took me home late, knowing that my father would hit me. He did this on purpose, because he often said that my father had to learn that he existed. It was a stand-off between the two of them, and he didn't care if I was beaten. Actually, there was a time when I started to hate him. I always told him: "Look, when I get home I'll suffer because of this and that." He wanted to start a quarrel with my father and in fact there were arguments later, after I was married. My husband was only waiting until I wore a wedding ring to start his rows.

That was funny. My father started to hit me, but quite frankly if he had told me the story, and made me see that my boyfriend was a bad lot, maybe I would have changed. Because at the time I was one of those girls who like

their parents very much, I always obeyed and did everything they said. Maybe things would have been different, but it didn't turn out that way.

As I was suffering so much my husband started to be kinder to me, to give me more support. At that time, when he was still my boyfriend, my father hit me with a hosepipe, one of those transparent ones that are as thick as a finger. He hit me, left bruises on my body and although I was the eldest, he let my brothers and sisters watch the beating. And in addition he disrespected me, he humiliated me in front of all my brothers and sisters, who were all small at that time but nevertheless understood what my father was doing.

When my husband saw that the pregnancy was advancing, because my clothes no longer fit me and I had no proper clothes for a pregnancy (I always liked to wear trousers and my trousers didn't fit any more) then my husband put pressure on his brother to go and make the request. I think that my husband was a bit rash but what could we do, with me being in that state? I couldn't do anything. A few days later my husband and his brother went to my father's house and asked to be received by him. My father finally agreed after listening to my mother.

One of my aunts, a dressmaker who was very close to my mother, went to speak with her. She didn't say that I was pregnant, she merely insisted that my mother and father should receive my husband's family. So then my mother understood. She told my father, and later took me to the hospital. I had the consultation, and the nurse said that I needed a lot of rest. I stayed home because I was very upset and once again my father became violent. He started to mistreat me constantly after the consultation. At that time, my mother started to give me smocks to wear, saying, "You must wear different clothes, you can't go out like that." My father continued to hit me even though by then I was eight months pregnant. I don't know why my father did that.

Before I got married one day my father.... I was in a lot of pain and my father was angry with me, he shouted so much that I was afraid of him. I tried to disappear at mealtimes and never sit at the table; I stayed in my room. I would wait until they had all eaten, and then I would go or I would try to sneak a morsel before they sat down to eat. I was working, and I used to go home for lunch and return at two o'clock. One day I came home from work in lot of pain. I was feeling so bad that I decided to leave work early. I don't know how I arrived home; all I know is that I reached my room. I had no idea that I would have such pains. The truth is that the nurse in the hospital said that I should keep calm on such days. My father arrived and he shouted, shouted, shouted at me; he humiliated and insulted me so much that I started to cry.

Then my father said to my mother "Are you ready? Let's go. And tell these girls that no one stays at home, we'll all go, she'll stay here alone." Then my father took my mother, my brothers and sisters and they left. They went to some insignificant place, they didn't go there to do anything. Why? Because my father had attacked me so much that I had started to have pains and he knew it. He knew and left me alone in my room. I was in great pain and I looked at my mother. I remember that my mother even said, "But are we going to leave her?" "Yes, let's go", was all my father said. They went and the pain continued. It was my first pregnancy and I didn't know anything. Pain, pain, pain, I cried with pain. Suddenly I calmed down. I don't know, but I think that it was God who helped me at that time. I calmed down, curled up, lay down, sweated, could not walk, couldn't do anything. I remained lying down and when they returned it was already 11o'clock at night. When they came in the first concern of my mother and my sisters was to rush to my room. They opened the door and my mother said, "Is she all right?" She came and looked at me and didn't say anything. My father arrived, glanced inside and then went to his room.

So everything they did was sufficient to make me prefer my husband, to see that the only alternative to ease my suffering was my husband. Because there was nothing else I could do. I was suffering a lot and the only one who

helped me out on many occasions was my aunt, the dressmaker. She told me, "You must be a woman, you must be brave, all this will pass, all this will pass." I said, "They did this, they did that to me", and my aunt said, "I know, you must calm down"...

My father knew that I could have died. I think he created that situation because he felt he would lose if I married my husband. So he deliberately created that situation, to show that neither he nor my husband would win. I think that was the reason.

It was a series of conflicts that in a way contributed to my leaving home feeling guilty because by then I had bad relations with my family. And this also meant that my parents made it possible for my husband to do what he liked with me. Because they didn't like him and because after all they did, all those conflicts, all those bad family relations, all that contempt, to some extent they were preparing the way for the break-up of my marriage. Indeed, my father said, "I don't give you one year in that house." My father insisted, "I don't give you one year in that house, you'll see, you'll be back here in my house within 12 months. I don't give you one year." My husband also came and told me things, "People are saying that your father said this, and that, and that." I replied, "No it isn't true. People are just trying to cause trouble. Don't pay any attention to them. I'm also being humiliated, treated badly. People want to see us break up, we shouldn't listen to them."

One thing my father said at that time was that as my husband didn't have as good an education as me this could be a source of conflict, "Look here, you're going to get married but you must realize that your future husband doesn't have your level (of education). That could cause a lot of resentment. Because whenever you say something, he'll always contradict you, he won't accept it."

I didn't see things the same way, because I felt that in addition to being a union and some thing we wanted, in a marriage the husband would obviously listen to his wife and would never take certain decisions without

her consent and knowledge. So my dream was that even if the man I married was less educated than me, we could really have a relationship, have children. Although I knew he wouldn't be able to get the kind of job that every woman dreams about, I felt I could see in him aspects that at the time seemed to me to be gentle and affectionate.

My father also abused my mother

My father used to hit my mother. I saw him hit her many times. He used to hit her. The last time he slapped her I think she was about 56, because now she's over 60. I was angry with him. I wasn't at home at the time, I heard at work that he had hit my mother, slapped her. My mother started to yell, and then my younger brother, who was still too young to be able to do anything about it came running to tell me, "Daddy has slapped mummy, mummy is in a bad way." There was nothing I could do but ask for some time off and go home to assist my mother. He hit my mother, then got all dressed up and went out; he didn't want to hear anything more about it. Then I turned against him, so did my sister and my brother who was living in another town, and another sister. They all phoned and shouted at him. I remember that all my sisters who live out of town came ...

My father is extremely violent, but now that he's old he isn't as strong as he used to be. I remember that my mother used to be beaten so much that her nose bled. At that time my father had government permission to own a pistol. When I was older, my mother told me that once she was covered in bruises because he hit her with the pistol. He used the pistol to hit my mother a lot; my mother brought us up but with much suffering, a lot of suffering!

My mother didn't have any way of showing solidarity with me because she had to do everything he told her. My mother didn't have the right to an opinion in the home, my mother had no opinion! My mother was severely ill-treated and she stopped going to work to take care of us, because she was

a teacher by profession. She told me and my sister that she didn't work because my father didn't allow her. She told us a lot of things and I also saw her being ill-treated. My mother also said that he always had an excuse for hitting her. He made things up, invented them just so he could hit her. He always made up excuses.

His friends knew very little about what was going on, because few people visited us. We more or less grew up among ourselves. We went to very few family get-togethers. I remember that my cousins used to come to the house and say, "We're having a little party today." My aunts would say "Today there's a family gathering, don't forget to send the kids." But my mother said, "No, nobody is going, nobody is going because your father won't allow it, we have different principles in this family." My father was a party member, but I don't think that he behaved like that because he was a party member. No. It was just his nature. It was his nature because my mother was always being abused. It's true that the party also had an influence, could have had an influence, but in truth I remember very well that we grew up without our neighbours ever entering our house! We can say that no neighbour ever entered our house, no girlfriend ever came to our house. My mother had no friends, no one visited her. If some relative from out of town came to visit after 10, 12 or 13 years they had to look for him at work, and then he would bring them home. Because the only contact point they had was his work. I also recall that my mother always told me that when her mother came there was always a row. My father always started a row and a hit my mother in front of my grandmother. And for my grandmother, this was the end of the world. It was his way of insulting her. He didn't like these visits because when my grandmother came my mother had to complain, to tell her everything that had happened. Then my grandmother also tended to provoke him, make demands, call his attention to something and he didn't like that. And so he even used to hit my mother at the table, and everything always ended badly. He hit my mother so much that the next day she was covered in marks and bruises. Then my grandmother had to tidy the house and was always shouting at my mother, "Let's get out of here,

get your things together so we can go back home and leave him with the children.”

We used to cry at the things we had to witness, we had to witness all those things. My grandmother would get very angry and said she would never come back, she would never see us again, but she came every year. But it became difficult during the war, very difficult. Nevertheless, she managed to come. One year she came by bus and didn't send a letter to warn us. She usually sent a letter, but that time she didn't, and she arrived at about 7 o'clock at night. We were extremely happy, and for my mother it was the end of the world. After so long without seeing her mother, it was the end of the world, and my mother couldn't sleep that day. My father was also very pleased, but later there was always that row.

It's true, my mother was always being abused. After I got married sometimes told me, "Linda, you have the same fate as me and if you weren't really a woman you wouldn't stay at home. You are going through more difficult phases than I did.”

The marriage

My son was born after we married. And my suffering started again, this time at the hands of my husband. Immediately afterwards! When the suffering started, the first time my husband hit me the baby wasn't even one month old.

Before we married there were some violent episodes, but no physical aggression, related to doubts about the paternity of the baby and demands that I should stop working after I got married.

After the baby was born I wanted to spend a few days in my parent's house, but he didn't like the idea of my staying with my parents. It wasn't because he wanted sex, in the beginning he wanted sex but just because he wanted to

cut me off from my family so the violence could begin. He followed that whole process of arguments, everything my father did to me and now it was his turn to do the same to show my father that he really had me in his hands and for my father to pay for everything that had happened. My husband would demand, "Come on let's go home." And before dragging me out of the house he went out drinking, he went drinking to pluck up enough courage to confront my father, and arrived in a bad mood, "Get your things together, aren't you ready yet? When I passed by I told you to get your things together because I was coming to fetch you. Get your things together immediately so we can go."

My mother got angry, "You're going to take the poor girl from her home? Let her stay a few more days."

"No, I can't allow it. I can't allow my wife to remain here. If she's really my wife, she won't stay. She's leaving now." Then my father said, "You came to collect Linda, but can't you see that she's only just had a baby, she needs to rest"

"No, no, no." He started to get aggressive and this made my father very angry. He was standing beside my father and then he grabbed the baby and my father got even more angry. I recall that my husband even said, "My wife will never set foot in this house again." My father just told him off and in the midst of that argument he got very angry, "Didn't I tell you that this was not a good marriage? Now do you see who has his hands on you? And I'll tell you once again, I don't give you even one year."

I got into the car and felt very disappointed on myself. I was angry at how badly my father had treated me, because of course if he had been a more affectionate father I wouldn't have accepted my husband. If he had talked to me, had given me advice, if everything had been different... And yet at the same time I was angry at my husband, because of the way he was treating me and because he was showing people, my parents who had not wanted to the marriage to take place, that they were right. And my father added, "My

daughter, you're going to have a very difficult time. Go on, but you're going to have a very difficult time. I went home that night and I remember that even my mother's neighbours came out to watch.

The violence started very early and lasted for years

The first violent episode started after a little party we organized to present the baby to my husband's friends and relatives. After most of them had left, I indicated to my husband that it was getting late, as it was almost 3 a.m. and I was getting tired. It was an effort to wait for the last guest and he was still drinking. I thought that it was very late, time for bed and in fact I could see that this last guest was not drinking so much. But my husband was drinking too much and he insulted me in front of the guest, saying, "Look here, I'm the boss in this house, and I won't stand it when you to say that it's getting late because we are drinking. Just sit down there and wait for us to finish." But his expression was so aggressive that the neighbour immediately said, "Calm down. You must calm down. You shouldn't explode like that!" He replied, "No, I'm educating her. She has to know that this is my house."

After the man had left he closed the door, called me in to the lounge and started to threaten me, "You've got to understand that this is my house, I'm the boss in this house. If you're used to being pampered it'll end in my house. A pampered woman in my house? It's got to stop." I was scared, but even so I didn't show it.

After he finished work, his business, he went drinking and only came home at 9 or 10 o'clock at night. I started to want to know more about his life. What he was really up to. "You spend so much time outside the house, when you come back you're drunk, you always come home drunk!".

In the beginning, when I started to ask these things he just looked at me without saying anything. He just looked at me, without saying a word. Then

I started to realize that he probably had a lover somewhere because when he came home his clothes always smelled of perfume and had lipstick on them. I started to understand but what could I say? I didn't say anything.

One day we had to take the baby to be weighed. I went to the hospital to get his first vaccinations and bumped into a colleague. When he saw me with the baby, he immediately came over to congratulate me. He congratulated me and shook hands with my husband. "He's so good looking and looks just like you, he looks just like you." And said to my husband, "This time you're losing, he looks more like his mother." Why did he have to say that? It was clear from his face that my husband had a different interpretation of what the man said! After the man left my husband made a threaten singe at me. People started to look at me and he went off. I don't know where he went. Then suddenly he appeared. We got into the car. He was holding a bottle of beer, because the whole time he had left the hospital he had gone for a walk, had a drink and appeared with the bottle of beer saying, "Let's go." I was alarmed, but got into the car. I asked him, "You left me on my own? There was a long queue and I don't know anyone." He said, "Weren't you with the child's father?" I was speechless! "The father?" I said. He's a colleague, someone who saw me grow up. When I left school I went to work for him. He knows my parents." "That's why your father tried to prevent this marriage, but you'll explain everything." We left and arrived home. I was afraid.

My husband arrives, opens the door and says to the servant, "Leave. Go out for a while, I'll call you later." And when I come in I put the baby in his cot and sit on the bed. I was tired and in pain. I sit on the bed and he says, "Is this child mine? Didn't I tell you to stop working?" And then he hits me. He says, "Are you crying? Are you crying in my house?" The baby was asleep, my son was asleep, but then he takes hold of my little son by the ears..... (She starts to cry while remember it).

He did that, but later he said he was sorry, very sorry. But he had humiliated me, had made me look a fool, hadn't he? He'd insulted me, he he'd taken

away my prestige, my personality, my dignity only to come and say he was sorry. I accepted although I was upset, because I couldn't see how and why that situation had arisen. I didn't deserve that kind of treatment, and this hurt me a lot because I started to lose weight, because I was no longer well psychologically even though I had my work to distract me and for me working was the best thing there was. Because while I was working no-one bothered me and I didn't mind spending the day there. Sometimes I even preferred to work on Saturdays. I had the keys to the office, and I asked but my bosses said that I couldn't because now I was married. If I were single it would be different, but I was married and therefore I shouldn't.

He was never the kind of person who says I'm going to x and I'll be home by x. When I asked him it was a problem because I always insisted on knowing where he was going, who with, what he would be doing, because he would leave in the morning and only return in the evening, and when he came home he was usually drunk.

There were other women; he was having affairs and then when he came home the question was always the same, "Who was here?" He would open the door, come in and go to the bedroom, "Who was here?" With that authoritarian tone of voice, that abuse of power because it was his house. Because it was his house he would wake me up suddenly, when I was fast asleep. On other occasions he woke me, but I wasn't asleep, I was worried about his return. Then I would hear his key in the door, and later he didn't even bother to try and open the door, he rang the bell. So I would have to get up. I had a difficult time.

He used to arrived home at 1, 2, 3 o'clock in the morning and I had to get up at 6 o'clock. In the beginning I was able to go to sleep but when he arrived home there was always that confusion, those rows. Then later I was able to sleep a little until 6, 6h15 when I had to get up. Because I had to get my son ready, had to give instructions to the servant and had to go to work. Sometimes I was able to do this, but sometimes I couldn't because I was too

worried about marital conflicts, and I was entering a phase when I couldn't sleep because I was losing my mind. I was becoming ill but didn't know it.

So he used to go out and as soon as he got back the first thing he did was to demand something to eat. Then he washed his hands and sometimes I'd already eaten, but he demanded that I should eat again. There was a time in my life when he demanded, "Why don't you eat?" I replied, "I've already eaten." "Please, you must eat, what have you put in this food?" My husband even said that to me, and that really finished me because I wasn't that kind of woman, "So you put drugs here so that my life is like it is now?" That was when he lost his good business. Then, because I was being blamed for so many things, there was so much insistence, I used to cry and cry and cry for certain period of time. Then I started to get angry, and I was able to say, "Look here, it's not my fault that you had the misfortune to lose your business." I remember that my husband even blamed my parents for his bad luck. In addition to blaming me, he blamed my parents.

I couldn't put up with all that violence any longer, he mistreated me so much. He even hit me in front of our servant, accusing me of causing his bad luck. I was accused of all kinds of things. My husband didn't even trust me to serve food that had been kept for him. So when I started to notice that I let the servant serve him.

Things also got worse when I asked to study. I often asked my husband to let me study at night, to improve my life and his life. But because he used to listen too much to his sister and her family he wouldn't allow me to go to school at night. I remember that once we were all together and he said that I intended to continue my studies at night. My sister-in-law immediately said, "What? She's going to study? Look, after she has finishes the course she'll leave you. Don't say I didn't warn you." And when I heard that, I didn't do anything more about it.

She said it just like that, "Get ready to lose her because I can assure you that this wife of yours is no fool." Then my husband became even more

aggressive knowing that he was with a woman who sooner or later would leave him, someone who knew his whole life history. Then my husband's violence got worse. My husband used to open the door, and at the same time without hesitation, he would grab me by the neck, take me to the sitting room, and the first thing he did was to slap me around. And I would cry until morning, "Why are you hitting me?" Either he didn't reply or just said, "Your family is saying bad things about me; I'm sure that I'm in this situation because of your family, because of you." It was a difficult atmosphere. I couldn't see any way out and my little boy was very small and I was very worried. My little boy was also being affected by that violence because he heard me crying. I recall that my husband hit me so much that I requested time off work without pay, because I was losing weight; I was becoming ill because I was so upset.

Our neighbours, and some women, used to laugh at me, some would laugh and others were the type that, after my husband left, would come and ring the doorbell and say, "Good morning, are you all right?" "I'm fine thank you." Because I wouldn't tell them anything, I didn't have the courage to tell them, but they heard me crying until morning.

At work it was the first thing they used to ask about. And this made me even weaker, without strength, without any self esteem. I wanted to fight but I had no one. Maybe if my mother-in-law had been on my side or a sister, or a sister-in-law, if we were living with more people, maybe I would have been strong. But I no longer had any strength.

I felt there was no way I could leave my husband.

I preferred to remain with him because I thought, "How can I go back to that house, my parent's house, what would it look like? How is my father going to treat me, if even before he treated me badly? And what will happen to my son, who's in the middle of so much disagreement? How can I go back?"

When my husband saw that I was ill, he gradually started to talk to me, promised he would be more faithful, that he didn't want to hurt me. He really started to see that he was behaving badly, because by then I had started to talk about a divorce. "I can't take any more, you arrive home at dawn, you hit me when you're drunk, and I can't see any reason why I should continue to be beaten. I don't do anything. Just because you're self-employed you're at home by 5 o'clock and, I have to continue sitting on the veranda until after midnight waiting for you. I have no information, I go to bed at three in the morning and then you ring the bell." And he had his keys with him, but he often rang the door bell. I think it was to make me wake up, to argue with me from the moment I opened the door. So I said I wouldn't put up with that any more. Whenever he wasn't drinking he always promised that he would change. But he never behaved as he said he would. There was just a brief respite of three or four days without drinking. Before my son was two years old I had an operation for an entopic pregnancy. They removed one ovary, but it was all due to the environment because there was no one I could talk to, to get things off my chest. After I had the operation he got scared. Everyone in town was pointing at me, and people were saying that one day he would kill me because of his excessive beating. Because there was no reason. Because he came home and hit me merely out of pleasure. After work, "Who were you with today?" Or, "Who is under the bed?"

I was in a bad way psychologically. There was no-one to help me free myself from that kind of conflict, that atmosphere. I didn't have my sisters, they were all young. My parents were at home and had imposed all kinds of things, and I had to submit to that marriage.

Later I had to break the silence. My youngest son was only three or four months old when I went to my parents' house. I remember that my mother cried when she saw my oldest son, who had grown a lot. Then my mother said, "I've been hearing about your life. Look here, I've heard that you're being abused. Is it true?"

I went to my parents' house, because I saw that my life was dreadful, but I wasn't well received by my parents. My mother received me all right, but my father didn't want me in the house. When I visited them he received me, but greeted me coldly. It was like that at the beginning. For a long time he greeted me coldly, but when he realized that I was being beaten, and that the violence was just too much, then he started to feel for me, to feel sorry for me. Because he saw that I was really having a difficult time.

I remember that I often sought refuge in my mother's house. I asked for time off from my job without pay. When I realized that my husband had paid for the house, had some money to pay the water and electricity bills, food, then I took the opportunity to spend time at home with my mother. I remember that sometimes my husband went out to drink and ended up drinking until late at night – until 8, 9, 10, 11 o'clock, midnight, 1 o'clock in the morning. Then he suddenly arrived and rang the bell. Even after we had come to an agreement that I would spend that night in my parents' house.

But then he took advantage of the situation. In the beginning he gave me this possibility, but then I learned about some of the things he was doing. He was taking the opportunity to go with other women, to bring other women to our house. He said, "Look, you go and spend time in your mother's house, you should rest a little, you're very run down" and so on. I always ended up agreeing because I really was getting very run down and preferred to come home the following day. But when I arrived home, because I was very alert I saw that things were not exactly as I had left them. I always tried to find out who had spent time in the house. Sometimes we even argued about it, "Look someone has been messing with my things." "Look, I left this here and now I cannot find it! But who is this soul who was in this house while I was away?"

Then he would hit me, but afterwards we had to have sex. But it was forced sex. It wasn't love that comes naturally. Then I started to get tired of all that I started to lose any desire or pleasure in a sexual relationship.

When he had his so-called lovers, when he was fine, we could go 60 days without sex. There was even a time when I slept in one room and he slept in another. I left my bedroom because I was not satisfied with the relationship. I even said, "I'm just waiting for a divorce." I knew that I wouldn't be able to get a divorce, but I told him, "Whenever you make love to me it is always after a violent scene. You're unable to catch our good moments, yours and mine, so that we can have relations because we want to."

There were some moments when we led a normal life, yes. But there were also moments when he hit me and immediately afterwards climbed on top of me. Then there were also times when I knew that he was coming and preferred to run away to make him realize that it wasn't necessary to beat me like that and then try to make up by having sex.

Because at other times, I remember, he came back from wherever he had been and I came home from work. In the beginning, when he didn't want me to work, I often came home from work and was forced to have sex, so he could see or feel that while I was working I wasn't involved with anyone. There were times like that.

And there was some thing else. I was not the kind of woman who had another partner outside, I don't have that kind of vice, that kind of life, but I spent my whole sexual life in hospital. Because I had a lot of discharge, women's diseases, constant discharge and constant pain. He was the one who gave me these diseases.

Sometimes I said, "I don't have any feelings for you." At the time I was thin, very thin because of so much violence, and there was no one I could talk to. I didn't even tell my mother. Then my husband started to despise me, saying that he wouldn't sleep with me because I was thin. But he was the one who was making me thin. He made me thin, and then said I was ugly, thin. "You're no good for me." But I knew that I used to be a well built woman, a stout woman... but he looked down on me.

I remember the time that I went to sleep in another bedroom, when I found that he had been sleeping with my maid, the young girl who took care of my only daughter because I was tired of carrying her on my back to the crèche. In other words, I hired a young girl, educated her, treated her with much affection... and he ended up sleeping with her.

Relations with the family and isolation

I had very few visitors; no one came to my house because I'd been rejected by my family; my sister only came to visit me once. My sisters-in-law were the kind who would try to cause a scene when he was present. I was never someone who talked a lot; I used to keep my mouth shut. The problem was the fact that I worked. I said, "I can't give up my job. I have to think about my children. I have to think about you, because by working I'm also helping you in particular, because from one minute to the next we'll receive the electricity bill, the water bill, you have no income, what will we do? We need to think about these things."

But in reality, they (my sisters-in-law) came mainly to start a quarrel. In addition to coming for a meal or to visit us the main reason they came was to aggravate arguments because afterwards my husband would be confused. Only later did I realize that my sister-in-law used to go to my house when I wasn't there, to speak to my husband, to explain things to him, to give her opinion as if she were an old, experienced person who really understood things. Then he and I would argue, have big rows. He tried to convince me that my sister-in-law had helped me, but I knew she had made my life miserable. She would also go to my parents to tell them that she felt very sorry for me, because I was suffering a lot. But behind all this she was sounding out my parents' views, and then went to stir up my husband. I almost started to feel aggression from both my husband and my family because she would tell my parents everything she knew about my husband, his past, when he was growing up and they were shocked. I was in the middle of all this. I suffered a wave of violence.

I was uneasy when my husband invited me to spend the weekend with his mother. I went, but not willingly. I said to myself that I would have to let myself be treated badly, to have to listen to all kinds of talk. The environment was too heavy for me, because I had to listen to all that talk after lunch. There was always someone who would start and when they did it wasn't to say good things. They didn't start a conversation to make helpful suggestions, to help or to suggest something that would really be beneficial.

With all that talk in that family, in the end there was bound to be a conflict between husband and wife, they had to get angry about the situations they were provoking. Because then they started to laugh, everyone was laughing but then this was followed by signals, gestures and other things. The environment was not good for me and very early on I decided to put an end to it. I no longer made frequent visits to my mother-in-law's house. I only went when it was absolutely necessary. But I had to go, because he forced me, "Why don't we go and spend some time with my mother?"

It was a difficult period, especially when a person isn't used to things like that; they're a young family aren't they? They are young people, with totally different points of view, and it isn't easy, it isn't easy to get used to such people. And there were always those conflicts and eventually his family started to worry about my characteristics, my race and everything. I had a very bad time. But I didn't reveal these things, I couldn't tell anyone. The only person I could talk to was my mother. I couldn't even tell my own sisters. I couldn't. I didn't tell anyone because I was so resentful and angry about what was going on, because it was not what I had dreamed about and that really hurt! I preferred to be alone - when I could, because my husband often forced me and I had to give in.

My husband didn't participate in these games, he understood but paid no attention, he didn't join in, and at times he would smile and preferred to leave. But in the end it's the wife who suffers most, isn't it? Because I had to stay there with his relatives while he went out, maybe to a bar, to meet a

friend, they went drinking or went to visit someone, and I was left there. I had to submit to all those petty things. So then, in order to avoid all that, I preferred to be on my own. I spent the whole day at home always washing, cleaning the floor, tidying up and doing anything rather than be with people. I preferred to spend my weekends that way. But then his family realized and when they did, they insisted that I spend weekends with them.

But getting back to my family, when I used to go there in the middle of a conflict my father used to say, “You can enter my house and I receive you here as my daughter, but not your children.”

And this made things much worse, it was demeaning because my father always said, “I won’t have that man’s children in my house.”

What kind of mother would accept that, have the courage to accept that, when I love my children so much, take such good care of them, feed them, I’m the one who is bringing them up. What was the point of being in my parents’ house, all comfortable, without my children, those I love the most? That’s why I saw my father as a monster, a seven-headed monster. I couldn’t say anything to him, but it was like being stabbed with a knife.

He simply warned, “You can come here. But I don’t want your children in my house, the children of that man, because he’ll come here and humiliate us, make us stay up all night. He’ll come to create trouble because he wants the children, wants this or that. No, his children stay with him.”

Although I’m still fond of my parents, from that day on I always stood my ground on that issue. Sometimes when I was there I got angry with them and told them to their face why I was suffering “Because you want me and you don’t want my children. No woman would allow her children to suffer privation while she is comfortable.”

My sister also didn’t help. A neighbour, a lady who no longer lives here, even told me “I don’t believe your mother and father are alive. I always

thought you were an orphan, when I saw you putting up with all those arguments, all that physical violence, I thought it was because you didn't have anyone." But in fact I do have a family, I do.

Once I asked my mother, "Mummy, if I came to stay here, I earn this amount, what could daddy do? I'll contribute to the household expenses involved in bringing up my children, my children won't cost you anything, he won't have to support them, I will." Then my mother went to talk to my father, and he said, "Listen, if she comes here she should know that she must pay all her children's expenses out of her own salary. And after the children enter this house, they won't ever be allowed to spend time with their father."

When I heard his reply, I saw the negative part: my children wouldn't be allowed to spend time with their father. I should know that from that moment on, the door would be closed to him; he could no longer see his children. I backed down. At that time my standard of living was not so high. In my house my salary was only enough to cover all expenses; I was able to feed my children and pay the water and electricity bills. So I could see an element of opportunism on the part of my father, because I was facing all these difficulties he even wanted to take control of my salary. This immediately made me think, "It is true that I'm suffering, but I prefer to return to the suffering in order to keep my children in a home that is mine, and to enable them to eat well and to be with their father."

It didn't help requesting assistance from the police.

I must say that from very early on I detested the police. Because my husband beat me up when my eldest son was nine, eight almost nine, the youngest boy was six and the little girl was only four. I remember that I spent the night in the police station because he beat me up so badly. He came home drunk around 11 o'clock or midnight. He beat me so much that I had to open the door and run away. When I fled I didn't even have any shoes on and had to go barefoot from my house to the police station to make a complaint. But in the middle of all that, when I managed to open the door and run away my eldest son also ran away, because all the children had woken up. My oldest son ran away as well as my second son, and my little girl aged three. They ran away and came to me; they ran away from their home, because of all the fighting. It was the beating... he hit them as well, the oldest child in particular, while the second and last children didn't suffer so much violence. But my oldest son - whenever my husband beat me, he beat him as well.

On one occasion he grabbed the boy and threw him to the ground, his little head and shoulders and his feet were in the air. He hit the floor. My husband would kick him and make him roll over. This is why my oldest son soon started to get involved with some bad people. He was afraid to come home. I had to go down and fetch him. But it was only because he was afraid to come home. I remember that my husband once handcuffed my two sons, it's true, it's true. He handcuffed them! Because in later years, he managed to get a job training guards for a security company and they gave him handcuffs, but he was never able to hold down a job.

But to get back to that day, the response of all the children was to run away, even though it was late. I stopped and gathered my little children a few metres from the house and went with them to the police station. In those days the police didn't pay any attention to resolving social conflicts. That's why, I've hated them ever since. They didn't take me seriously. They even had the cheek to ask, "Are you married?"

I replied, "Yes, I am."

"Look, your conflict is with so and so. He likes to hit you, we know that. The only thing you can do is to go to court or to the prosecution service. Tomorrow you should go to the prosecution service or to court to see if you can resolve the situation. This is nothing to do with us."

My stomach tied itself into a knot. Yet another door had been closed. Why? Because I went there seeking help, hoping they would do something, and they didn't do anything. They only allowed me to stay there. They said, "Madam, you shouldn't be out on the street at this time of the night, you might be killed or beaten up. You could be raped. What you should do is wait here until morning and then go home and do what we said to resolve your problem."

I recall that I sat on the floor. It was cold. I sat down on the floor. I looked at my children all huddled together. I took hold of the girl, stuck out my legs, and laid the little boys' heads there. And then I looked at one of the policemen. There was so much pain, I cried so much that night. Then one of the policemen took pity on me I think and put me in a reserved room. I just looked at him and thanked God. I couldn't say anything. I took my children and went there. It was cold, but not as cold as the floor.

I thought, what can I do? My God, have I got to spend another night like this? But the only important thing is that at this moment I'm not being beaten. I'm not in the street. I have shelter, my small children are with me and I'll wait until daybreak. But I knew how embarrassing it would be leaving in the morning without any shoes. I would have to walk across town with the children, who were now asleep, looking all scruffy. Everyone would look at us. Then what happened? The police said "We'll let you stay here until morning, until day break, then you can go because there will be people in the streets." I thanked them.

Doubt and anguish

I must say that even today I don't know why my husband treated me like that. Because if he had been intelligent, the mere fact that I was a virgin when I was his girlfriend should have been sufficient for him to see what kind of girl he was dealing with.

For a while, of my sisters-in-law was killed through domestic violence, and her husband was never charged with anything. So the mere fact of knowing, being aware that I'd lost that sister-in-law through violence, made me fight back. I started to be aggressive because of the atmosphere in my home. I felt that I had to protect myself because I couldn't stand that life any longer. I hadn't been married 60 days before he started calling me names. "You're dishonest, a prostitute, poor. You married me because you knew I had a roof over my head." There was so much humiliation! "You married me because you saw the kind of house I have." When all is said and done, I married him, he was my boyfriend, but I had had other boyfriends, boys who were very reliable. Maybe that was why my father got so angry. But I must also say that my father destroyed all my relations with these boyfriends.

At first, when I started to get aggressive he was surprised because he was used to walking all over me, doing and undoing without my saying anything. In the beginning I used to run away from the house. Because it was always the same: he would come home drunk, he had the keys, a set of keys. After I lost my job he left me at home without food, the children couldn't eat and he went to eat in his mother's house. He spent time in his mother's house, ate in his family's house, backwards and forwards with friends, and then came home to sleep.

He came home, rang the doorbell and started an argument. I no longer accepted this. "Look here, we've spent the whole day with just a little tea and a piece of bread. The little boy hardly ate anything, just some porridge. There's nowhere I can go and eat; you no longer want to work, you don't

want to do anything.” At the time he was unemployed. "You don't want to work, you don't want to do anything. You say that you only want to be self employed, but can't you see that you have to work, you have to do something?"

“Why do you want to interfere in my life?”

“I don't want to interfere in your life, but I am telling you that you must get a job. You're married, you have a home, you've got children at home. We need some food.” Because in one way or another he managed to get some money to pay the rent, pay the electricity bill; he managed to get money to pay the water bill. He did some odd jobs here and there, but he took the rest that should have been used to buy the month's food for the family and blew it away. He bought a little something for the home and ended up drinking the rest. He had to pay for his friends, he was always wasting money with his friends. So after I lost my job I got angry and argued with him. It always ended with a punch, always! I suffered, I suffered but I also started to react, "Not like that; no way no, I can't accept it, I can't."

Once, after I got a new job, I saw that he was spending the money I gave him to pay the electricity bill on his own personnel things. I demanded to see the electricity receipts and I accused him, "I am doing you good because I am working. I don't ask you to provide washing powder, toilet soap. I don't ask you to pay the water bill, or to buy sugar, I don't ask you to pay the rent, the water bill. But you're not making the effort you used to. I remember that you used to make an effort to pay the rent, electricity until we ended up without electricity and you couldn't pay the rent. And in addition, now that I'm helping you, you call me a prostitute, I am not going to work, I am going out as a prostitute."

I tried to find ways of letting off steam

During the early years of our marriage I acquired the habit of letting off steam by keeping a diary about my difficulties. It helped me to bear with them. But one day, when I couldn't go to work for four days, I asked a colleague to open my drawer and take out the necessary papers. He lifted up a ream of paper in one of the drawers and found the notebook where I used to write. More than half the notebook was covered in writing. Then my colleague got curious and I think he took it out and read it, but he didn't put it back as he found it. He left a page crumpled and as I'm someone who pays attention to detail, I saw that someone had been handling it, because I saw the ream of paper on the desk. I knew that he had seen the notebook and when I opened it I saw that some pages had been handled. I only had to look at him and was amazed; my colleague looked back at me and shook his head. Then he said, "Linda, you're not happy. There's no joy in your face. Tell me a bit about yourself."

I said: "It's no use. It's my life; it's non-one else's business."

Then people started to look at me with sad, sorrowful and heartbreaking expressions all at the same time, because of what I was going through. But they said nothing, they just greeted me. So I think that everyone in the company knew about my life. I only had time to take the notepad out of the draw and tear out the sheets. I felt bad, I felt so humiliated... I started to tear them up and put the sheets in a plastic bag, and as soon as I arrived home I got a box of matches and burnt them. Since then, I've never tried to keep a diary.

Later, when my son was about three years old, I started to write poetry where I described my life. I put it in the bottom of a chest of drawers, underneath my clothes where I kept the notebook there and other things. I would look out for him coming and tried to put only my clothes in that drawer, nothing else. I even put packets of sanitary towels there to discourage my husband from opening the drawer. But he did open it and

saw what was inside. When he saw it he went and showed some verses to one of his friends. He didn't show them all, only some. Then his friend warned him. He said, "Your wife is in a very difficult position. You must be more calm, more gentle with her, because your wife isn't well." And I remember that this colleague even came to work and advised me. He said, "I'm talking to you as a friend. I don't want to interfere in your life, but if you really feel that your marriage is on the rocks, it would be better if you left that house rather than stay there because you'll still have to put up with a lot. I know your husband, we grew up together. I know that he didn't have a good childhood and I've known about his affairs for a long time. He drinks, and then he becomes even more violent, and that won't be good for you." I preferred to remain silent rather than pour out my heart to his friend. I preferred to continue with my husband because I thought "what would it look like if I appear on my parents' doorstep. How will my father treat me now, if even before he treated me badly? And what will become of my newborn son when there are such arguments?"

When I did that, I was writing and telling my whole life, not three months went by without my writing. And then I decided to stop. I didn't keep anything

About work

Even keeping my job was difficult. Doing a row when we were still dating, my husband expressed doubts about whether I was pregnant by him. He was using this as a pretext to get what he really wanted, my job. He said, "If it really is mine, you've got to stop working." I looked at him and said, "I can't." Then he said, "It's not my child, because since you're working who knows whether your colleagues have had a go with you." That was a violent row!

My mother once said to me, "If you stop working, and he's doing all this to make you stop working, then afterwards you won't have a job to amuse

yourself. You can't come home to visit us, you'll have no contact with people. It will be total isolation. And then he'll make you a miserable wretch, he won't give you any food (financial support), he'll make you a miserable wretch." And that is precisely what he tried to do.

The women in his family were worried and some of my sisters-in-law said that I had to stop working. Why should I work if all the women in the family were housewives? Even some of my cousins, who have since died, said, "Why do you have to have a job? You have everything at home; you don't need to work. When you work you're undermining the homes of others. Now you're joining our family and you're undermining it because the women spend the whole day at home, but now they're complaining to their husbands and saying that they also want to go out to work. It's your fault. Because you go to work, you arrive home and take care of your life, but it shouldn't be like that. You're married, you must stay at home, you don't have to work. In our family we have these principles, women stay at home, women should stay at home."

From then on I no longer liked my husband's relatives and I became very worried. Firstly, because even before we got married, I'd said that I wouldn't stop working, only if one day I lost my job. And while this didn't happen, I wouldn't stop working. My mother had already convinced me, had explained in detail the consequences for a woman who marries a self employed man, because he could just as soon have work as not. Then I started to see that in addition to all the other conflicts my professional life was in danger.

In the beginning my working life was a bit difficult because I didn't do very well at school. I started working when I was 17, and to compensate for not having much education at the same time I took typing and telex courses. Later, I also attended night school to conclude the commercial course, but then I was recruited into the army and went to do my military training in another town.

When I left the army I returned to my old job and worked there for many years. But I was unfortunate I lost my job because after many months without receiving a salary I complained and showed that the company (a public company) was making a profit. It was an unjustified dismissal, and later I was persuaded to take the case to court, which I did. Years later I received some compensation at a time when I was going through a very difficult period.

When I lost my job it took a long time to find another one. We had nothing at home, even the water and electricity were cut off. And my husband didn't contribute anything. I was desperate and knew that I couldn't count on my family. So I decided to start a vegetable garden on a piece of vacant land next to our house. I'd never done anything like that before and didn't even know how. Some neighbours laughed and made fun of me. Only one of them encouraged me.

I had to work on that empty piece of land to make a vegetable garden to feed my children. And I did it! And then I saw that my husband didn't want to be bothered with his children. I was ill, but I had to do something for my children. I had to work on that land, remove all the grass and weeds, dig over the ground all by myself. What I grew would support the home.

My sister came and encouraged me, "You're an educated woman. You have to work. I can't bear to see you with only the garden to feed your children because you need to dress your children, and you can do something else." "When I was working" this is her talking - "I was a queen in my house. But now that I no longer work my husband is ill treating me. When I ask him for something he says he has nothing; he has enough to go out drinking but nothing to give me. I asked him for clothes for our small children, and he refuses. Let's go and work." She gave me much courage, and with the assistance of the Universal Church, she and I went to register asking for a job.

I managed to get a job, but first I told my husband and he agreed. But I didn't abandon the garden. From that moment on my life started to improve, to improve. I left at 12 o'clock and at 3 o'clock I was at home. But before having lunch I always went to tend my garden. If I didn't do this early in the morning it was because I had to clean the house, get the children off to school. As I watered the garden I started to get more green beans, more cabbage, more greens, nothing dried up. It was wonderful. I was delighted that I was able to do something positive. And my life was getting better, now I had soap and OMO for washing, because I like washing very much. Despite being ill treated by my husband I was making substantial progress in my life, I no longer had to ask for rice, stew, all those things that my children didn't have. I started to be the one responsible for the home.

How I started to take a stand

He started to realize that I was taking a stand, because of the way I was behaving, because I started to change. But I didn't change suddenly from one moment to the next. It was a slow change, and I was always careful to show that although I was suffering a great deal, facing many difficulties, I knew what I wanted to achieve in my marriage. Because when I married, it was my intention to marry the man I really liked, that I like, and to have children, and to always educate them under the father, in the company of their father. Maybe because I'm not a very excitable person I always thought that I should give my children the same education that I had. But an education that was a bit better. My children should have better conditions than me. I always thought that. My children should have better conditions, should study more than I did, and they should also grow up as happy children with good memories of their family and the home that protected them. Unfortunately I think this didn't happen. I didn't realize my dream, because of the excessive violence I faced in the home.

So I was frustrated at this. I got angry, and that's why even today I'm a disappointed woman. That's why I am always in favour of the reconciliation

of a married couple, but I think we must always show the man, the head of the family, his negative aspects and their eventual consequences.

Because I can remember very well that I used to say to my husband, "We don't have this, we don't have that." And my husband often became angry, "You're demanding too much, you want this, you want that..... did your father give them to you?" I also got angry and always told him that although I didn't have these things, that was no reason why my children shouldn't have them, because I had a job and I'm still working today. Then I demanded that my husband should also work to provide the minimum for his children.

I took advantage of his weaknesses, of his showing me the bad life he was living outside and that he brought into the house. That's how I plucked up sufficient courage to argue with him.

One day I told him, "You've got to stop drinking. You're too weak to work, but you are strong enough to arrive home drunk and demand the impossible, because you know perfectly well that I have nothing to give you. And you hit me. But you're hitting me without reason. First, because I'm the one who is working, I don't have sufficient bread for the children. When I do have bread, it isn't enough because it doesn't last 30 days, it lasts less. I don't have adequate clothing for the children. I can't buy anything for myself, or for the children, or for you. But we could be sharing these expenses - you could pay for the water and I could pay the electricity bill. You could pay the rent, and I could pay for food and still have enough left for savings and to maintain the house."

So, I made a detailed analysis within myself, but I wasn't the kind of person to say anything to anyone. I was suffering, suffering, and always angry and I went on suffering. Then I started to get brave; when he hit me I immediately shouted back. There were moments like that, when I complained about the lack of this and that, of him not doing what he should do and doing what he shouldn't. Then he would immediately grab hold of me. He hit me a lot,

really a lot, and I cried, I thought about my children, because instead of harmony he created a storm, he hit me, mistreated me, saying that I was being encouraged by my parents to demand a better life.

"I know you went home to your mother last week," he would say. As he used to keep me cut off from my family he thought it was impossible for me to turn against him, but the consequences really forced me to get angry. Because I didn't agree with him I started to say, "This home has nothing. My children have a father, a healthy one thank God, but he doesn't bring them anything."

He would let a long time go by without bringing anything home. Even years would pass, without his bringing anything that would really satisfy his children. During that time when he didn't bring anything home, what made me most angry was when he came home drunk. After apologizing he always said, "Oh, my friends pay for me, they pay for me. They pay everything." But to tell the truth, during the first year we were married he had his own quite profitable business. When he lost his commercial license he stopped working and the situation has remained the same up to today. He has some small business activities that earn a little and only now and again. He refuses to get a job because he says he doesn't want to have a boss.

But getting back to what I was saying before, this continued for some time. Not a short time, it lasted for years. And I often remember that when I and my colleagues at work had to fill out forms, I always wrote "self employed" as my husband's profession. And there were even colleagues, male colleagues who said, "Lindinha, you always write self employed, but your husband arrives home drunk, he hits you, he doesn't put any food on the table."

I would reply, "You're wrong, he does." It was a way of defending him. Despite suffering all that humiliation I would say, "No, my husband does. You don't know anything about my life, you don't know how I live, how could you imagine something like that?"

I often let my colleagues make these comments. My colleagues even said, "Linda, if your life isn't going right, why don't you try and change it?" But they said it using other words, indirectly so as not to hurt me.

Then I always got angry, very angry. It was through those small rages that I started to gain strength to start telling him everything. Because when he said, "You went to hear things in your mother's house, you went to hear things in your family's house", it wasn't true. It was just something that I was feeling. I increasingly felt and saw my life going down. Now there was nothing to do except to tell him.

So through all those arguments I started to see that I had to fight, I had to fight back. I had to fight and build my personal life, and show my husband that I really was angry.

He drank too much, much more than normal, and when he arrived home he would say "It's because you have a lover." The other reason was, "Because your family says this, and this, and this." Then he would hit me with such violence... Only God knows. He would hit me, I would cry, and on two occasions I ended up with my leg in plaster: once on my foot because he kicked me and my foot was swollen, I couldn't put it on the ground. I couldn't wear shoes, and had to go to hospital. He hit me because I asked him money for food! When I went to work that morning they could see that I was dragging my foot. My former boss authorized me to go and get it treated. I went to hospital and they put on a plaster cast for seven days. Then I took it off, did therapy and continued to work.

Another time, he kicked me in the same leg and I had to use a half boot. I remember that I wanted to go to work, I was crying because when we can't walk normally life is different, but with a plaster it was difficult, I had to walk very slowly, very slowly. But I always wanted to work, because I'm a woman who likes to work.

I had good colleagues. Some said, "But why don't you separate? Separate from him and organize your own little house over time." But it wasn't easy. It wasn't possible with the salary I earned. In order to have a little house I would have to live with another companion and I couldn't see myself living with anyone else.

I don't know if it was because of so much violence, but I couldn't see myself continuing my life together with another man. Because I always said and thought, "This man is doing this to me; another man could possibly do even worse." I thought that as we didn't know each other intimately, maybe he would take advantage of me." He might not hit me, abuse me or beat me but he'll know about my past because people will tell him everything and more. And from then on he'll know why I'm with him. He'll feel sorry for me. He'll want to be with me because he feels sorry for me. Instead of love, it will be compassion, pity... And I really wouldn't like to have another partner who pitied me.

I'm not a well educated woman, but I have the minimum to be able to examine my life. I wouldn't like, wouldn't want to share expenses with another man to bring up my husband's children. Because I knew that my husband would never give me sufficient for maintenance because he didn't work, the children would have to live off someone else, even if I worked. But I thought, and I think, this will make a new marital relationship deteriorate once again. Because he for sure has a family, and the time will come when he talks with his family, will have to explain to his family. And they'll always have something to say. So in my moments of conflict, I would prefer to go home to my parents...

He was never the kind of person who would apologize, who would recognize that he was at fault. He said he was sorry but said it was my fault, I had provoked all that violence. At those times he was more gentle, and for some days he avoided getting involved again.

He has not attacked me physically for the past two years. Perhaps because I am working in a place where I have to know the law, because now I am the one who is imposing and making him shut up. Because now I'm able to dominate him to such an extent that he shrinks back, he shrinks because I immediately say what he should do. When that time comes, I don't mix my words, I don't tread cautiously for fear of being beaten up. I even tell him he can try and beat me up. This is because before I was the kind of person who would say something but was afraid. I was afraid because I knew that immediately after speaking I would be beaten. Today I am more likely to say, "I know you're angry about what you are hearing, but the truth must be told. You can use your strength to make me shut up, but the truth is clear and everyone knows it." I'm a person of few words and when we have an argument I say, "My life has always been hell, you were always a father who paid little attention to his children. I was the one who had to keep this house standing, with the pittance that I earn. You're unable to support your children, or at least offer something to your children, not even a pair of shoes. When you have money, if you are drinking you immediately invest it in drink."

And I'm an enemy, a real enemy of drink. Perhaps because drink has contributed to my misfortune throughout my life, I cannot, I hate, hate drink. And drink was never good for him. Because he becomes a different person, a savage, an animal, it gives him courage to do anything

But now he hardly ever attacks me, also because my children are growing up. And my children are growing up angry, my children are growing up angry. And in growing up, they see that their mother is everything for them. They see and they understand more.

So, I answer him back immediately, it has to be so. But I always tell him, "I don't have sufficient strength to stand up to you, but one thing is certain, every time you've beaten me it was for no reason." And he continues to depend on me

How the church helped me

I started to hear about the Universal Church in 1988. In 1988 we still had many arguments and I used to go to the Catholic Church. I attended my neighbourhood church, and I used to go there and attend the catechism. Ever since my children were very small they've gone to the Catholic church every Sunday. I opted for the Catholic Church because of so many conflicts; I had so many conflicts that I sought refuge in God. So I started to attend the Catholic Church.

But one day when I was talking to my cousin she told me about the Universal Church, and even said that I should listen to the radio at 3 o'clock, get the right channel and try to listen to Radio Miramar where I would hear prayers. I tried to do this. I remember that on that day I didn't even go to work so I could try and find the channel. When I did, I started to listen and it was a day when they were talking about the family. It was a Thursday, the day the Universal Church only talks about the family. What a family should be like. What is the family for us? How does evil enter into the family?

I listened to the prayer and liked it so much that I lost no time. When my husband returned I told him, "Look, today I was trying to get Radio Miramar, and I succeeded."

He asked, "Have you left it on the same channel so we can listen tomorrow at the same time?"

I replied, "Yes. I left it in the same place and we can listen. Not me, because I've got to go to work, but you can listen."

But as I had left the radio switched on and no one had changed the channel, that night, very late, about 10 or 11 o'clock I remember that my husband woke me up to listen, "Is this what you heard? Is it this?"

And he liked what they were saying. So then the radio remained tuned to that channel because we were afraid of missing the broadcast that we wanted to hear. Friday arrived. He listened, I listened at night, and we heard from my cousin that the Universal Church really was here. For us it was easy because first there were pamphlets, and then they broadcast on the radio to publicize that they were here and that they were going to have their first service for anyone who wanted to attend, and the doors would be open.

The first believer that day was my husband. At 9 o'clock, as soon as he knew that the Universal Church was here he lost no time. He arrived home extremely pleased, "The Universal Church is here, get ready to go, because it's already 9 o'clock."

I think that the Universal Church service had an effect on him. Maybe because he was unemployed, and the Universal Church preaches about unemployment. It does. It is one of the principles that in the Universal Church we must give a tithe, we must make this gift and the pastor always explains that, "Walking around badly dressed is not divine. Without making a gift to thank God who brought us into this world doesn't make sense, we must give the tithe. Because the scriptures say that we must give our best to God, of all that we earn every month we must reach the end of the month and give one tenth, 10%, to God. It's in the bible. Because in the past men offered animals, didn't they? A sheep, or the best they could get out of their lands and they worshipped God."

I think that these principles touched him. Because despite being what he was, he read the bible, we had a bible at home. When we got married he had a bible, a coloured one and I didn't even know that it was a bible. I thought it was just an ordinary book. Then one day I picked it up and saw "bible" written there. I turned the pages and said, "This really is a bible. Where did you buy it?"

"I bought that book a long time ago", he explained.

Perhaps because I wasn't used to it, I preferred the normal bible, but I think that as he had a bible he was sure to read it. Especially because at times we in the Catholic church learned Ave Maria, the Lord's Prayer, then the glories and all those necessary little things. In fact sometimes when we were chatting normally and talking about the divine words, I asked him recite something to show that he knew the words. He replied, "Look, the essential is to love God. I might not know all this by heart but what is important is that we must respect the bible."

All this happened at a time when there was a lot of violence in our home. I don't know for sure, but I think that the fact that he had bibles at home and recognized that God is all powerful was sufficient for him to go to church. But in addition I think that he was looking for a transformation in his life. Just that. He wanted to change his life, even though he perhaps didn't say that he was looking for a way to change his life. Because I recall that sometimes (other times but not often) I would wake up and cry until early in the morning. I was like that for a long time. I cried because I knew that sometimes there wasn't even a bit of sugar to put in my children's tea. I cried, and he heard me crying, sobbing, and said "Look woman, life is like this, it has high moments and low moments, but we must be able to control ourselves. Because one day you'll have more. And who knows, perhaps you'll have a lot more than what people have today."

I shut up, and I also agreed with him, but as I was still only a girl it was difficult to see my children drinking tea early in the morning without sugar, without anything. But in this respect, he gave me that courage...

He started to go to church. We went to the first service that the Universal Church organized here. He went at 9 o'clock, arrived home and invited me: "I went to the Universal Church, I attended its first service. It was fantastic. Now I've come to invite you because there's a service at 12 o'clock, 3 o'clock and 6 o'clock. Which service would you prefer?"

So I said, "Let's go to the 6 o'clock service. But what's it like? Can we take the children?"

"Anyone can go. There's room for everyone."

I went at 6 o'clock and when I heard the prayer I was amazed. I was amazed because I had never seen a church or a pastor praying like that, so freely. I was used to the Catholic Church's services. But what the pastor was preaching about was what was really happening in my life. Lack of food, his unemployment; he also talked about not having a house. Some people really don't have a home, but this wasn't our case, but constant arguments. He talked about violence, a man hitting his wife, being drunk, things that really touched my husband.

The pastor made everyone close their eyes, and he said that that was because of devils. Then the pastor prayed to expel the devils. And when the service ended he was the first to ask me "Did you like it?"

I replied, "Yes, I did."

"Then let's stay for the next service."

I was amazed. How could he be attending three services throughout the day?

But at the same time the pastor was observing who was joining the church. Indeed, the pastor invited those who wanted to talk about or explain their problems, to come after and before the services. He said that the men should talk with him and the ladies should talk to the missionary who was the pastor's wife.

I didn't go on the first day. I still didn't believe it and I didn't know what she was going to ask me. All I saw were the many problems I had, so many, many problems. And then to suddenly find a church that talked about these

things, that touched directly on my problems, I was a bit worried. "Has someone told him that I am going through all this and that?" I asked myself. But my husband no, he went to talk to the pastor immediately.

It was the church that got him to stop drinking. He stopped going with other women. He no longer hit me. And it was interesting, because he also invited most of the women he had been really involved with to go to church.

Today we're at peace

Today I'm satisfied with my relationship with him. I'd be even more happy if he were still in the church. But although he is no longer in the church, he's a lot better than he used to be. First, because he doesn't create so much conflict, doesn't stir things up. Second, because now he appreciates me, whereas before he thought I was worthless. When he's in a good mood he even says, "I've got a great wife, I've got a great wife. You lot shouldn't insult your mother; anyone who insults your mother should beware. Heaven help anyone who doesn't respect your mother." He can say things like that. Today when I'm ill he cares more about me.

In the past, he would care only if he felt like it. And on other occasions he wouldn't care at all. But today he cares. If I say that I'm ill, I have something, the first thing he does is to pray, and after the prayer he says: "Let's go to hospital to do the blood test to see if you've got malaria."

He's very concerned about me, even though I can't say that I am a totally happy woman, you understand? But after what I've been through, the marital relationship I've had, today I can say that I'm content, my life has improved, it's improved a little. Even though it still hasn't improved in all aspects, at least he's become kinder in our marital relationship. He listens to me.

Some days ago he told me that he has been giving advice to a friend and had told him “I always say, look, nowadays things are very different to what they used to be because women rebel. They demand their rights. Can’t you see that women are reaching for the impossible? Look at them. If they catch you, if those organizations know that you’re beating your wife like that, they’ll send you to the women's office in the police station. And there they’ll deal with you. Because there they have police women, and they’ll deal with you. Do you see? After you’ve beaten a woman, it’ll be a woman who deals with you. You must be careful, because women are rebelling, they’re demanding their rights. They’re the boss in the house, everywhere. You must be careful, take good care of your wife. A man can’t beat his wife.

I was speechless.

Sometimes I complain a lot. Then he says, “Why shouldn’t you complain? You’re a moaner by nature and now you’re demanding your rights. One day I’ll have to put sticky tape over your mouth, stand in front of you and salute. He’s joking. He’s always saying, “I’ve got to salute you.”

Sometimes I laugh and the children joke with him, “Look daddy, mummy and her rights.”

He replies, “Yes, all women are angry, they’re all demanding their rights.”

By way of conclusion

A lot has happened since we last spoke and I told you my story. At that time I felt at peace. Not totally content or really happy but at peace. Until things started to change again, and it seemed as though we’d gone back to the old days.

What happened was that my husband started drinking again as soon as he got some money from doing odd jobs. So the old habits started again: arriving home late, forcing me to get up at dawn to open the door and give him something to eat, jealousy without reason, and beating me. And just when I thought that everything had been resolved, once again I'm afraid and anxious. There were various episodes of physical aggression, one in public where everyone present could watch; people even stopped to look at us. No one intervened, probably because he threatened to hit those who were watching closely, asking them if they were my lovers. There were also private scenes of great humiliation, as when he spit on me in front of the children.

Perhaps because of all this, I became seriously ill with liquid in my lungs. I had a very high temperature that didn't go away, but the hospital only gave me medication for malaria. It was only when I was very ill that the doctor requested an x-ray and discovered I had something in my lungs. But before that I was really in a bad way. But he used to leave in the morning and come back at night, leaving me with the children, who didn't know what to do because I couldn't even get out of bed.

I've lost the weight I'd gained, and feel physically tired and morally exhausted. But I won't give up. I have to think about my children. The oldest is the main victim of all this violence in the family because his father was always hitting him and insulting him. He's got involved in trouble. All this because he's seeking outside the home what he can't find within his family. Because of them, because of my children, I'm going to have to leave my husband. I've thought about it and taken the decision. Even if we live in a hut, life can be good if there is peace. What use is a good house with a minimum of comfort, if there is no harmony? If we feel humiliated?

Since we last spoke I've also learned something else and I must talk about all that I've suffered. I started at work and told my colleagues in detail about how I was being ill treated. They knew indirectly but this time they heard

the full story. Since then, I must say that they've given me a lot of support. I feel that they're with me and I won't suffer alone any more.

I did the same with my neighbours, especially with two women who I know also suffer violence at the hands of their husbands. There was even an interesting episode, the morning after my husband spit in my face. When I went downstairs to go to work, he was on the pavement and doing his things. There were also some servants carrying water and one of these neighbours asked me "So, how was your night?" And I replied, "Very bad. Imagine"... etc. I told her everything that had happened in a loud voice. She and everyone present heard what I said, including my husband who kept very quiet. The other neighbour I mentioned also understood that something was going on. She came to ask what had happened and I repeated everything. I'm not going to keep quiet any longer. Later that day, my husband said to my daughter, "Your mother's dangerous". I also threatened to go and talk to his friends, his drinking buddies, and tell them everything he had done that to me. He didn't react, but I think he was afraid.

One thing I've noticed is that the violence increased when I let slip that I wanted a separation. I get the impression that he won't allow it and this is his way of paying me back. But it won't stop me from going ahead, also because I have the support of my children. Even my youngest daughter has intervened and lectured her father, asking what he would think if he saw his own mother being hit in the way he hit me. When there's an argument at night the children immediately open their bedroom door to find out what is happening. They want to protect me.

I know that if we don't separate he'll end up killing me. Everyone tells me that - my sister, my colleagues and some friends. I'm also worried about the AIDS issue. Over the years I've learnt that when I'm suffering a lot at home, and he's out getting drunk, there is always another woman close by. But there's no way I can tell him to use a condom. As he always does, he'll turn the request against me, "Who've you been sleeping with" or "What have you got to be saying that?" So it's even possible that I've already got

the virus. I don't know. My son has advised me to be brave and go to an AIDS counselling office. I don't know what to do.

But I'm not going back; I'm going ahead with the separation. After I started talking about my situation, many people have said they'll support me. But first of all I'm going to the police. Now I know about the offices for women, and that they'll help me contain this violence. I want to leave because I don't want to be beaten any more because of this. I don't want to continue living with this fear.

Life story 2

GABRIELA: Learning to find peace and tranquility

When I saw Gabriela looking back on her life it was as though she were discovering and organizing her memories. At times she was surprised at what she had left out, thinking that life is like that, no doubts. But now, looking back from a distance, she is amazed that she didn't react earlier. Gabriela works in the human resource field and this brings her into contact with people and their problems. She has dealt with and listened to many people who are suffering, with problems similar to or even worse than hers. This has influenced her interpretation of her own life, which to some extent also happens to other women. It helps her to reflect and to find solutions. It helps her realize that she still has a life to live.

I see Gabriela with illusions and yet, despite her insecurity, with a certain optimism. She has triumphed over the pain of the past and this makes her think of a simple and possible future. She has the strength to fight for a more independent life. She questions "the home" as the only setting for becoming someone in life, but has not given up on love completely. She wants to be free, not dependent. She thinks she will succeed.

Gabriela is 35 years old. She lives with her three children and has a lover. She was born in the countryside. Her father was a carpenter and primary school teacher and her mother a peasant.

She has concluded grade 9 and is continuing to study at night. She has a job and is financially independent.

My first boyfriend

First I would like to talk about my marriages, the period when I was married. I would like to start by talking about my first boyfriend.

I was in secondary school, grade 5. He was a cleaner there, and that's how it happened. We barely went out on a date. One fine day I was coming home from the market and bumped into him. He spoke to me and that was that. He was living in a shack; I accepted his invitation, and that's how it happened. That was where he seduced me. I was only 15.

We started going out together. He would invite me to a restaurant to have a coke and that sort of thing. The following year, 1986, I was 16 and still at school in grade 6.

I was living in my aunt's house, my father's sister. Then one day he invited me to his house, and I went. It was just before the final exams. I went to his house, I arrived and well ...we.... we had sex. But I didn't realize immediately that I was pregnant. [Smiles] It was the first time and I got pregnant immediately. I was 16 years old!

I continued living at home but there were some small differences, vomiting, feeling sick, I don't know what. But I still went to school, I didn't drop out. Then on the eve of the exams I started to feel ill, and my stomach was growing.

One morning, when my aunt came to wake me up, she found me vomiting. She asked me what was going on. I said: "nothing, just a touch of malaria. I think that's what it is, it'll pass".

But my aunt was suspicious because people had already warned her "I think your niece is pregnant", "Your niece etc. etc."

So my aunt went to fetch an old lady. They came up to me, started to look me over and I ended up saying what the problem was, that I was pregnant. Or rather, I didn't exactly say that I was pregnant. I said, "I don't know what's wrong with me, all I know is that I haven't had a period for three months". I was already four months pregnant.

Then my aunt asked about my boyfriend and I told her. "My boyfriend is so and so".

They went to look for him and he accepted responsibility. He didn't deny it.

So then my aunt threw me out of her house saying she couldn't live with me any longer because I was pregnant and one day I would start having pains at night and she would have to go and find my husband. So I went to live with him. But he didn't live with me in his house, where he was living. He took me to his parent's house about 14 km outside town. But OK, I understood.

My parents-in-law were peasants. I went to live with them while he continued to live in town because he worked during the day and studied at night. I couldn't go to school any more, I just stayed at home.

In the morning we would get up and I would go to the fields with my parents-in-law. But I wasn't used to that kind of life; I wasn't used to working in the fields. I grew up in a rich family that had everything. I found it unbearable but I put up with it because I felt guilty and was afraid to go home to my parents and apologize for getting pregnant.

So I lived there and then one day the baby was born. I remained there after the baby was born, working in the fields.

One day I was asleep with my first child, it was before I had my second child, it was night time and suddenly my father-in-law appeared, opened the door of my house and came in. I was aware that some one strange had come into the room. I woke up and sat up in bed, but he got into bed and called

me by my name, “so and so, so and so”, I answered, "Father?" I thought he was looking for his son, "He isn't here. He'll come on Friday".

He said, "I want to talk to you".

"What about?"

"I want to make love with you".

I said, "That's impossible".

I started to scream and my mother-in-law understood what was going on. He ran out and hid behind my house. But when my husband came at the weekend and I told him, he said, "You're lying, you're accusing my father, what's wrong with you?"

He grabbed hold of me and started to hit me. It was the first time anyone had hit me. He got hold of a stick and started to hit me. I screamed and screamed until his mother came to help me.

That was then I realised that there was nowhere I could go to complain - because of what his father did. First, your father-in-law opens the door and asks you to do whatever with him. It can't be right; there must be a mistake. I tell my husband and he starts to hit me, to insult me. I was really shocked me because even if I had agreed to go with my father-in-law, it wasn't fair, it wasn't fair. I couldn't go and tell my relatives, because it would just make things worse; I preferred to tell him. But he didn't want to hear what I was saying, he just ignored it.

My family was neither rich nor poor; it had a social level that provided a decent standard of living. They were always making comments about it. "She despises people because she comes from a rich family; you should marry a woman from a poor family in our area", and things like that. So he

ended up agreeing with what his family was saying, because we ended up separating and he went to live with someone else.

He didn't like me. I sensed that he didn't like me. I was only there because I was the mother of his child. It hurt. I was in a position where I had nowhere to go. I couldn't go back to my relatives, as he hadn't paid any bride price. He didn't marry me, so I couldn't go back to my parents' house with a child. It was a nightmare, but I thought it was best to stay there and suffer, to receive all those insults from my in-laws, with him as my husband.

I always said (that he should go and present himself to my family) because they required it, demanded it, but he couldn't be bothered.

I only liked him for a very short time, a very short time, when I was pregnant with my first child. But everything changed dramatically as soon as the baby was born. I could never understand why things changed so much.

I lived with my in-laws for three years. No one gave me any advice. I was all alone.

When my child was about six months old – it was during the war - I got tired of running from one place to another at night carrying a baby. So I decided to go and live with my husband, to avoid having to run around the bush with my child crying. We used to sleep in the bush because of the bandits. So I ended up living there; we lived there for a while.

In the town where he was living we started to see that life was becoming very difficult, we had almost nothing, and a baby to take care of. And my husband started to treat me badly; he didn't like me anymore. My husband insulted me in many ways. I put up with it until one day I decided to have a talk with him, "What's going on?"

It turned out that he had another girlfriend and he would take off and spend a couple of days with her. So I said to him, "Look, why don't you take a course there?" because people were registering for a course in another town. So he registered and took the course.

When he left to attend the course my relatives in another town invited me to go and live with them because I was having such a difficult time with the child. I had no food for him, no clothes. So I went to live with them. But his family felt embarrassed and went to my relatives' house and said, "We would like our sister-in-law to come and live with us because our brother is still attending the course".

So my family agreed. I went to live in his brother's house in another town. I lived there until my husband finished his course and then we decided to go back home. A year later we went back home, to our province, to live in the house of one of his uncles. At the time he was a soldier, working in a nearby town.

I lived for a while in his uncle's house because he went of to South Africa and left me in charge of the house.

My husband no longer came to my house, didn't give me any money. So I decided to go and speak to his bosses. I spoke to them, and they gave me some child support at the end of every month. And that was that. One month, two months would pass without him setting foot in the house. My son was growing up. Then one day he decided to come back home. After he arrived we resumed our relationship, and once again there was an unexpected pregnancy; because I didn't know how to avoid it, and also I didn't know what it was... what it was like. I was merely doing it for the sake of doing it; it was a childish thing to do.

So I got pregnant again and he went off again. I was always being left alone. His parents took pity on me because I was alone, pregnant and with that little boy. They came to fetch the boy and I was left on my own. My belly

was growing, growing. Sometimes he came back after one month, sometimes after two months, but he didn't bring anything because he had another woman in the town where he was working, who he had also made pregnant.

I continued to live there. My relatives sent me food and my belly was growing. So I told him "Look, I'm in this state, I'm pregnant". I went to the place where he worked, "I'm pregnant, you can't let so much time go by without visiting me; one of these days I could die".

He said, "No, that child isn't mine".

"It isn't yours?"

"That's right".

"All right then".

I did nothing more; I just went back to live in my house.

Then the day came for the baby to arrive and it was a boy. I told one of his colleagues, "Go and tell him that I have a baby, a boy".

I carried on living in the same place. The people who helped me were neighbours, friends, sometimes his relatives, my relatives; that's how I managed to survive. Then one fine day he decided to come back home. When he arrived I was already there with my little baby. I went to the hospital on my own, gave birth one night and the following morning I left the hospital and went home, because I had no one to take care of me. I had to go home in order to bathe and do other things.

I went back on the third day for the baby to be vaccinated. Then he arrived and stood in the doorway and said "Good afternoon". I greeted him. He said, "I can't stay long, I must get back".

"What? You can't stay at least..."

He said, "No, I can't stay, they didn't give me any time off".

"Ah, didn't they? All right".

After a while, he said, "So I'll be going".

"No. At least say something. The baby has no name and he's already two weeks old."

He accepted responsibility for the first child, but not for the second. He said, "You must go to your relatives' house with this son of yours, so they can name the baby because he isn't mine".

"What? All right then".

I did nothing else; I just stayed there. I waited almost 15 days to see if he would come back, but he never did. So I decided to take my baby home to my relatives. I told them the story, what was happening. By then my father was dead and the house belonged to my uncle, my father's oldest brother. They said, "If that's the case and he rejects the child, we'll name him after your father.

I went home to live there with the child. But I couldn't accept that he didn't want me. So I went to the place where he was living.

I liked him, I liked him a lot. But he didn't like me. So I went to look for him; we sat and chatted and I said that I was tired of living alone, I wanted to go and live there with him. He said he didn't have a house. Then one of his uncles helped me to find a house and I went to live there.

I was living there when, a few months later, a girl came to say that she was pregnant by my husband. I received her but didn't say anything. I got someone to call my husband from work.

I said, "I have received this lady who says that she's pregnant and that you are the father is it true?" He didn't deny it; he admitted it.

They (the girl was with her parents) went back home. When the baby was born, the girl's parents came to my house, "We've come to tell you that the baby has arrived. We want clothes; we want soap and some flour to make cereal for the baby".

I gave them what I had for myself. My husband wasn't there; he lived where he worked. He only came to visit me now and again. And then there was a very sad incident. He was a soldier and in order to make me leave the house he came home with his gun and threatened me with it. He hit me. I was so violent with me. I suffered so much. I could tell you so many sad stories.

Once he came home in the middle of the night. He came and banged on the door. I heard him. Who was this person banging on my door? Why doesn't he knock and say who he is? He banged on the door again. I asked, "Who is it?"

"Open the door".

By the time I had left the bedroom door to go and open the living room door, he was already kicking it in. I asked, "What's going on?"

He fired a shot into the air, and I passed out. I fainted. My little boy started to scream, and my neighbours came running, "What's going on, what's going on?"

He fired again, closed the door and left. The child continued to cry inside.

When my neighbours saw me lying on the ground, they ran to my aunt's house. They said, "Your niece is dead". My aunt came running, organized a car and they took me to hospital, where I had to stay overnight. I suffered from very high blood pressure. I was always collapsing. At night I couldn't sleep. I just lay with my eyes open until dawn. Then I started to iron my clothes at night, so I wouldn't be tossing and turning in bed alone, because it hurt so much.

Once I was in hospital for a week but he never visited me. I left hospital and went home. He left me there with those children. He knew that I had left hospital and gone home, so he came to the house and started an argument, threatening me. I didn't say anything, but immediately after he left that evening I decided, no. I was fed up with being treated so badly, I decided it would be better to leave him, so I took my little children and went to stay with my relatives.

When I arrived at my aunt's house, my father's sister, I explained the situation, what it was like. My aunt said, "All right".

It turned out that the next day someone went to my house and when they didn't see anyone they went to tell him, "I passed by your house and no one was in." So he came home and saw that I'd taken all my belongings and my children's clothes. He came to look for me, but when he arrived I wasn't there, I'd gone to town. He arrived, took the two children and left. He went to leave them with his parents, far away in the interior.

When I returned, "Where are the children?"

"Their father came and took them away".

I left. I didn't go after him, because I knew that if I did, maybe I perhaps something even worse would happen to me.

I didn't go and visit my children, because I couldn't. How could I?

My youngest child wasn't well. He fell ill, very ill so my father-in-law sent someone to fetch me. When I arrived he started to insult me, "You're a witch, you're casting a spell on my grandson to stop him from coming to live with me, because you left my son's house accusing him of being poor, and now you're casting a spell on my grandson".

He was shouting and then he said "I sent for you to come and get your son".

I took my son, the youngest, to hospital. He refused to give me the older son, he didn't want to.

I came back and as soon as I arrived I took my child to hospital. We were both in hospital and the child started to recover. I started to live with my son. I was living, I went on living but how, I don't know. His father didn't come to visit the child and I didn't have the right to go to his father's house to visit my other son. By the time my son was seven years old I had a relationship with someone else. And this someone did everything possible to help me study. I went on a course, came back and started to work.

I saw that my life was improving. I also saw that I was more relaxed, my blood pressure was falling. I went on living and that's how I overcame my first marriage.

My second marriage

After I finished the course that enabled me to get a job I started to go out with someone. I had a lover. Later, after we had been together for a while, I discovered that this was his sixth marriage.

Men are good at talking pretty. We talked and agreed that he would take me home to present me to his relatives and that he would go immediately and present himself to my relatives. My family said they wanted bride price.

That was no problem for him. He had the bride price in less than three months because he had a job that paid good money. And he went to pay the bride price. Then they gave him the list for the marriage, and it took less than a year. We prepared our marriage, the day arrived and we got married. Our marriage was so beautiful, so beautiful, but ... The marriage happened so quickly, I couldn't believe it. It seemed as though we hadn't been going out for very long.

By now I knew how things were. I had more experience. I was a mother. It wasn't just playing around. We talked and started to go out together. And as he lived alone, I used to go to his house to listen to music. We went out together; I spent nights there. Because I was the mother of two children there was no one keeping tabs on me.

But after the wedding things changed. He showed me that he was bad; he hit me. I think he was naturally bad. Yet he had behaved in that special way when we started to go out together. I think it was just because he wanted to woo me, to have someone close to him, because he knew what he was really like. I was his sixth wife. It was a way of getting me to believe that he was a simple person.... and I fell into the trap. And after I had agreed to everything, the marriage and all, that was when I started to see a difference. Right from the start he treated me badly. Every day in his parent's house he would hit me. Then afterwards we made up and got back together again. Every day our godparents came to the house, resolved everything and we got back together. But it was no use.

While we were going out together there was never any indication that he would hit me, that he would harm me. Whenever I asked for something he took out money and gave it to me, why I don't know. And after we were married I was really happy for two months. Two months.

When I started to live in his house after we were married he didn't want any neighbours in the house. He didn't want me to go to a neighbour's house to chat. I had to remain locked in the yard. At home I could only talk with my

children, my stepchildren, and my nieces. So it was hard for me to make friends with our neighbours, and for then to tell me what he was really like. But from the moment he started showing how bad he was, I realized that he was keeping me locked up so that I wouldn't hear and see things about him. So, little by little, as soon as he had left for work I would steal out of the yard to go and talk to the neighbours. I was careful to watch the clock, to see when it was time for me to go back home and then I would run back to the house. I started to understand when the neighbours said that he'd always been like that, and that I was his sixth wife. And later those ladies started to appear, "Hi, I've come to see my son", "Hi, I don't know what", and that's how I learned about him.

The arguments started two months after we were married. "Hey, we've been together for quite a long time and you haven't produced a child yet". I already had my own two children, but they weren't with me, they were living with my aunt.

Then, "Why don't you have a baby, you must have a baby" and so on. Then I saw that I had to produce children. He had married me and was always swearing at me. He insulted me because of this, and that, and that. So then I understood that I had to produce children.

But before I got pregnant he didn't want me to have a job. "You must stop working, you must stop, you must stop; if you don't stop working we won't be happy here in my house. You've got to stop working".

I said, "No, I can't stop working".

He hadn't said anything about this when he was courting me - nothing about having a child, nothing about stopping work. As soon as we got married I had to stop work, I had to have children; I had to do whatever, "Because when you go to work you go to meet a boyfriend".

I refused. I would wake up in the morning and go to work, and sometimes when I got back he would slap me around. Sometimes, when I got up to bathe the next day he would lock me in the house and I'd get into trouble at work. I couldn't go out and by then I was pregnant. I was pregnant, but our life didn't get any better. It didn't get any better. The situation just got worse. When I look at myself, I mean, it's as though I am looking at a bitch that I don't know... I feel as though I'm looking at a donkey that no one values. He was always hitting me, beating me up. It even got to the point where he hit me so hard that I was in intensive care for a week. I was two months pregnant and there was the danger of a miscarriage. He used to punch me, hit me. He was a big, tall man and you couldn't dodge away, fight back, couldn't do anything. He could fight four men at the same time. I think he did it because he realised that even though he was treating me so badly I couldn't leave him because I was carrying his child. I would think a thousand times before leaving, leaving his house pregnant or with the child. I think that is what he thought.

I went on living with him and my stomach went on growing. Once I was not feeling well so he went to our godparents' house, because my godmother was a nurse. He went to get here to give me some injections. A cousin appeared and said, "I've come to visit you, how are you?"

I said, "I'm a little better. I sent your cousin to fetch my godmother to give me some injections but he hasn't come back yet".

Then my cousin said, "I'll go and call him".

I replied, "Wait a minute and I'll go with you".

I went out with two of my husband's nephews. My cousin, me in the middle and the two nephews either side. We started to walk along a road leading to a stall where we saw him drinking. I saw him from a distance. That was my husband, with his arm around a woman and they were drinking. I pretended that I didn't see anything but my cousin saw that I had spotted them. She

tried to pull me to one side so I wouldn't go to the left where he was. But I turned so forcefully, with such strength that I hit my cousin. I went up to my husband, grabbed hold of the woman and we started to fight. We fought and fought and fought. I got up. While we were fighting my cousin ran to tell my aunt that there was trouble. She went to my house and called my aunt.

I went home. When I arrived I sat down. While I was sitting there he came in (my husband) with some sticks. I was seven months pregnant and he came at me with one of those sticks that have thorns, that here we call "thorneys". He came at me with one of those sticks, and started to beat me. Each time he hit me it stung; the thorn broke off and stayed stuck to me. He started to kick me in the belly. Then my aunt arrived, "Don't do that, why are you doing that? She's pregnant, you can't do that", and a lot of other things.

My aunt took me to the bathroom so I could have a bath. She started to take out the thorns..... she started to take those thorns out of me. Then they took me to hospital for treatment. I had to stay in hospital because there was the danger of a miscarriage. I was in hospital for 15 days. From then on my health meant that I would spend two days at home, and one week in hospital.... I couldn't go to work any more.

There were police in the hospital but at that time we didn't know that that what he had done was a crime. I didn't know that it would be easy to make a complaint to the police. I just received treatment, went home and stayed there. He continued to be violent. Even to the extent of hitting me while I was in labour. That man was a tyrant, a big tyrant.

After the baby was born we started to live with the little baby and he continued to hit me. I'd lost my job. He went to the place where I worked and insulted my bosses saying, "You're useless, because the money my wife earns here is worthless, it's just small change, I don't want my wife to work here anymore".

He did that without my consent. He thought that if I had a job I'd have an affair with someone, that I would look down on him, because I earned more than he did; I'd despise him, disregard his wages. So he preferred that I stay at home. I went back to live in that house but I was in a bad way. I was desperate, disillusioned. I was very thin, so thin that my own relatives rejected me because they thought I had AIDS.

But I understood. I was living with the children he had had with other women. I understood that his other wives had also left him because of his violence, because they couldn't take any more beating.

Then one fine day he left. He left, went off. Then I said, "I'm tired, I'm leaving. As I had many things in his place I rented a house, took all my things and left them with relatives, and went to live in Maputo for a while.

It was only when he returned that I learned he had gone to his home town with a girlfriend. He was always having affairs with other women. In the early days I kept quiet, but when I saw this it was too much and I spoke to him. He did it deliberately, sometimes he invited his girlfriend to a place near our house and they made love there. People came to tell me, "Yesterday we saw him somewhere, doing this, doing that".

Sometimes his women even came into the house on the pretext of asking for water when in fact they came to see if he was there or not.

I just said, "Look, I know all about your goings on, your girlfriends and all that."

He insisted, "What are you talking about? Who told you that?"

I replied, "I can see from the way you're behaving here at home that we aren't getting on. That's what I said to him.

But later I spoke to him more seriously, because I caught him in hotels, even in our home. I only had to travel and he would bring women into the house and sleep with them in my bed. He would never change. He just said, "No I'm sorry, I'm sorry". Sometimes he hit me. Not a month went by without him hitting me.

I told my family about my problems and they wanted me to leave him because they too could see that I was being mistreated. They went to talk to him on several occasions, but without success. While they were there he pretended to be listening to them. But as soon as the relative left he started to insult me, "Why did you call your family to come here and show off just because you're rich. I don't want to see your family here again, because...". It was always like that.

Later, as I already said, I went to live with relatives. He came to their house, "I want to apologize, I want a reconciliation, I want etc. etc., I won't do it again, because etc. etc. I don't know what ...". You already know that that man has a way with words. He wanted me back because he could see that here in this province he had no chance of finding another wife, because most women knew what he was like. So he realized that he would spend the rest of his life alone, because it isn't normal for a man to leave five wives. I was the sixth. It isn't normal. It means there's something wrong with him, all that beating.

So I agreed to go back. I liked him. I liked my marriage. I started to think, "No, he's my husband, I like him, I love him, I must live with him. This will pass, it's just a phase".

After they all persuaded me, I believed they were right. That he'd change. He promised he would change his behaviour, that he would never hit me again. My aunts all said, "Yes, he really could change, you must go back and gave him a chance".

I was persuaded, and he knew that if he wanted a reconciliation he had to spoil me, do everything I wanted. He pretended he loved me, that he had changed. But that was while we were in Maputo.

Then one day we decided to move back [to the province]. But he had left a woman there. He'd got himself a woman and let her live in our house. So when I accepted the reconciliation, I said to my relatives, "He's got another woman", because I already knew about it.

He said, "That's not true. Let's go there so you'll see that I don't have any woman. You've been listening to gossip".

I said, "All right".

Then I spoke with his older brother. I told him, "Someone sent me this letter. It says that he has a woman at home".

Then his brother took out some money and said, "Go there and check it out, otherwise he will be telling the truth. You're saying these things but you're far away and he'll say "You see, she refused". If you go there and prove that he has another woman, then you should return to your relatives".

I packed my bags, but the next day.... He said that we would catch the six o'clock bus but he said that only because he wanted to phone the house and tell the woman to get out. But the woman refused. She said, "I won't leave, because I already have problems with my family because of you. I'm staying here in your house".

So he phoned his cousin and said, "When she leaves to go to school you stay and remove all her clothes and put them in a stall because I'm coming back on the bus tomorrow.

The woman had said she would stay; she didn't want to leave. So when she left for school at about five o'clock in the afternoon he took all her clothes,

suitcases containing her clothes, and hid them somewhere. We were expected to arrive by bus at around five o'clock. I already knew that he had a woman so as soon as I arrived I went straight to the house. The children, my nephews who were living with them, started to say, "Welcome, Welcome".

Then he said, "I'm going to buy a coke for the child".

He left and went to a stall. In reality he went to a stall where he could wait for the woman, to tell her to lay off because the lady of the house had arrived. But she took another road. When she arrived home she found me there. "Ohhh".

I said, "Precisely".

She didn't say anything. She just arrived and sat on the veranda. Then she said, "Good evening".

I said, "good evening".

His sister-in-law was there, the wife of his younger brother. So I asked her, "Who is this lady? Can you tell me?"

She said, "Err... I don't know. My brother-in-law will tell you".

So we waited. He returned and when he came in he saw us, "So you're here already?"

I asked him, "Who is this lady? What's she doing here? What did you tell me in Maputo? Didn't you say that you don't have a woman?"

We started to argue, and then we started to fight. He hit me a lot. I saw that there was no point so after two days, when my wounds had healed, I packed my bags, took my son and went home.

I went back home to live with my relatives. I started a business, going to South Africa, Swaziland. My brothers gave me some money to start my own business and got me a passport.

So I went on living, getting by....1997.... 2000. Dealing with the paper work related to my job. And in 2000 I was re-admitted to my job. But they said I had to go back and work in the province where I was before.

As soon as I was re-admitted I said goodbye to my relatives. And here I am once again. I've been working here since 2000, in the same place where I used to work. That's how I manage to survive that part of my life.

We're still not officially separated. I just managed to get away from him, and I'm alive. He's living in his own way, and for the time being he has no woman. Ever since we separated he hasn't lived with a woman. He lives in the street - one day in this woman's house, the next day in another woman's house. At the moment he's living in Maputo. I don't know what he's doing there and I still haven't managed to do the paperwork for a divorce. But I think that some day..... also because I don't have enough money for a divorce. I only earn enough money to feed my children. One day I'll get a divorce, when I have enough money, so that I can be more at ease, more free.

But I'm happy. No more problems in my house; I'm with my children. I'm living well. I have no regrets and as I am still young, 35, perhaps one day I'll need a partner. But so far I haven't thought about living with someone again. I'd rather live like this than live with an abusive partner.

I had a normal childhood

At the time of my first marriage I was living with my aunt because my mother became ill. In fact, she suddenly started to go crazy. So her relatives

felt she should go and live with them and my father would live with us. But what really lay behind all this was the fact that my father married another woman. She had children of her own and treated us badly; she didn't like us. So my brothers and I complained and on one occasion we even hit our stepmother because she wouldn't give any food to my brother. That kind of thing.

So we ended up running away from the behaviour of my father and stepmother because we saw that nothing would change. We left, we all abandoned the house and that's how I ended up living with my aunt.

My father and mother had 10 children, eight girls and two boys, but two of them died and I didn't even get to know them because they were older than me. I was my parents' last child and in the end we were seven girls and one boy.

We got on with each other. We always lived with our parents and had the minimum conditions we needed. We had our home and sufficient for us to grow up until the time we were separated from our father. But we still have good relations. That's to say, there are always some disagreements in a home. There are certain brothers and sisters who get on with each others, and brothers and sisters who don't. One special thing in our family is that we tend to have one to one relationships. Two of others get on, we're pairs. I'm the friend of one of them while another is not my friend. We're organized two by two, two by two and so on.

I started going to school when I was seven years old. I studied normally, without any problems. I almost studied up to grade six without failing once. We used to go to school, we studied well. We were the children of couple who liked us a lot and we just carried on with our studies.

I didn't see any difference between my brother and my sisters. Ever since I was little we grew up in a house that had a maid to take care of us, because my mother spent most of her time in the interior, looking after her fields.

She left us at home with our late father and the maid. My late mother used to come home and spend the weekends with us. We were spoiled by the maid, didn't do anything in the house. We just played and played. At meal times we were called to the table and then went back to our games.

I liked being a girl and now I like being a woman. When I reached had my first period I was living with my sister. My first period appeared on 8 February 1983, in the morning.

When it happened I was afraid to tell my sister. I told my niece, "You mustn't tell your mummy".

I was afraid. I had a bath and then came back and sat down. But my niece went and told my sister. My sister wanted to know what was going on. She asked me, "How long? Since when?"

I replied, "Since this morning".

Then she took me and gave me some traditional treatment. She told me what I should do, how I should behave, how to wear a sanitary towel. And that was it. I remained indoors for 30 days. She said I couldn't leave the yard; I must stay in the yard. When it had passed I carried on as usual.

She told me that it was something normal, that it appear for 2, 3, or 4 days a month and then would disappear. She didn't explain why. I never knew why.

My sister was so mean because she wouldn't let us go out to play. We only went out to go to school. When we returned from school we stayed in the house. I didn't have many friends when I was small, but now I do.

My first boyfriend

I didn't have sex with my first boyfriend. He was the son of a pastor and lived near to where we went to church at the weekend. We saw each other in church and he said he liked me and wanted to marry me and I agreed. I was 12 and he was almost 18.

I was still a child, it was the kind of affair that overly involved going out together, returning home, we never thought about going to bed.

We continued go out together. He studied, I studied. He wanted to come to my parents' house and present himself, but his parents wouldn't allow it. "No, she's still a minor, you must continue with your studies, you must finish school". Because they'd registered their son for a pastor's training course. "After you've finished the course then you can go present your self".

We went to church, went for walks and then he would leave me at home. He had the right to enter my relative's house any time he wanted. I also had the right to enter his parents' house. But I wasn't allowed to spend the night there.

We were in love, excited but there was a lot we didn't know and nowhere we could ask questions because I was a minor.

Then he eventually went to take a pastor's course in the city and I was misled by someone else.

I fell deeply in love

Once, last year – no, it was 2002 – I had an affair with a married man. I loved him very much, from the bottom of my heart. I liked him very much. We became lovers, and our love was very beautiful. He loved me too.

We only had one small problem. We started to go out together in 2001, 2002, and I got pregnant. It was a desperate pregnancy. I didn't want it. I took family planning, took pills, but suddenly got pregnant. How I don't know. So it was a desperate pregnancy. When I found out I was horrified. I never liked the idea of interrupting a pregnancy so I call him and said, "I'm pregnant".

He said, "How?"

"I don't know, I'm pregnant. You know that I keep my pills near my pillow so I won't forget them but somehow it happened".

He was married to someone from the same area, who knew me. He was shocked. He said, "So what are we going to do?"

I said, "I don't know, you should know".

"Let's terminate it".

I said, "Terminate it? No. I don't think we should do that. I prefer to remain pregnant and after the baby is born I'll look after it. I won't tell anyone that it's your child. I'll let it grow up just like others do".

And that's what happened. He accepted. But he said, "If you have any problem call me".

One fine day I started to feel very bad with abdominal pains, and I phoned him, "I don't feel well, I feel dizzy and I've got stomach pains. He came to visit me and then left to go to school because there were also classes at night".

After a while I started to feel really ill. I got someone at work to take me to hospital. When I arrived they called the doctor. When he came my abdomen couldn't take any more. It hurt so much, even outside. Just touching made it

hurt. They prepared me and took me to the operating theatre. They found that it was an entopic pregnancy that had broken. I had an operation and I was able to phone him the next day. "I'm in hospital, in this situation"

He didn't come to see me. The first day, the second day, he didn't come. I spent nine days in hospital and then came out and went home.

While I was in hospital I was very shocked. It hurt a lot, but that passed after I got home.

He continued to help me, took me from home to work, from work to home. When he had to travel he would tell me and I arranged for someone else to give me a lift from work to home, from home to work. We continue to be lovers until the year before last, 2003, when he got a scholarship and went to study abroad. It was the end of our friendship. We didn't argue, we didn't fight, nothing like that.

But after a year, at the end of the year before last, it didn't matter any more. He came and went. When I phoned him he didn't have time, because he was studying and so on, and so on. When he appeared he no longer came to my house etc. Our relationship had ended.

Today I only have lovers

At the moment I have a friend, and elderly widower. Perhaps one day I might live with him. At the moment I don't want to live with a man who wants to live with a woman for the first time, a man who still needs to have children, a man who still needs to go to the registry office and get married. At this point in time I don't want that. I need a widower or someone who is separated from his wife – but knowing the reason for the separation. Maybe I could live with him. But I won't give myself to him completely. I prefer to have my own house, and for him to have his house. His house is for his children; my house is for my children. We will each have our own house. In

that case we would have three houses. I'll build my children's house – that is, my house – with my salary. He will have his house where the children of his late wife, and we'll have a house for the two of us.

I already have my house- it just needs some little things doing to it - and I can leave it to my children. He has made some improvements to his house. Now all we have to do is build a house for ourselves. I've been with him for two years.

Nowadays I feel good about myself. I'm an adult. I know how to decide, I know what I want. As regards the past, I think that now I can more or less see things in the right perspective /I've got some thing to look forward to. But I say that I'm not a very lucky person because when I like and love some one I end up being unhappy with him. When I don't like someone, he likes me a lot. The two never coincide, me liking him, loving him, and him liking me, loving me. There's always a little difference. I like him, love him, do everything for him. For the time being I have my house and I live with my three children.

Whenever I have a lover I say, "I'm free, I live alone in my house. I'm not one who likes to spend the night in her lover's house. No! Why? Because I have children and would feel guilty if I only returned in the morning or if I left my lover's house and went straight to work so that my children only saw me the following evening.

I prefer to pull the man to my house rather than going to his house. I go to his house to do the washing, iron his clothes, those little things and sometimes we spend the day together. But I always want him to spend the night in my house.

My life as a woman

I had my first and then my second child without knowing what it was like for a woman to have pleasure with a man. It was only in my second marriage that I started to notice the difference, but I'm not saying that it was because our blood didn't match. But it didn't. I did things that would give him pleasure. I did it because I was in his house, and had to do it.

I knew that pleasure existed. But I tried and couldn't. I couldn't experience pleasure. I don't know if it was because our blood didn't match, I don't know. But with other lovers, the one that ended when he went to study, I felt like... [smiles] the end of the world. It didn't require any effort. Sometimes when we were apart I would phone him, "What's news?" I would ask. Or when he was in the house I would feel the need and I had to tell him, "Hey, I need X."

With my first husband I felt that being a woman meant being a housewife. I accepted that. In my first marriage I accepted that. Because it was before I had any notion of life, I didn't know anything, was still a minor. I accepted it. Some times I felt bad because I had no time to rest; I had to run the home, look after the children, without any time to sit down or to go out. It didn't matter if it was the weekend or the middle of the week. I was busy in the kitchen, in the fields, in I don't know what. It was difficult for me, a nightmare and yet I knew that in my relatives' homes at least my sisters in law were not treated like that.

I have a lot of respect for my current lover because he's older, almost the same age as my father. He's an elderly man who already has grandchildren. So I respect him. I feel that he who should be my father, my advisor. I've lost my father and mother. I'm an orphan so I look on him as my father and have a lot of respect for him. But love no, I don't love him. I just like him. And he helps me when I'm worried about something. He can satisfy me but not because I love him. I don't.

I miss that. [She sighs]. I think it's better to live with someone you like but don't love than to live with someone you love, but Deep down, deep down he's not for you alone. He's for many women, he betrays you. So I prefer it the way I am.

Pleasure is important. If, for example, I don't have sexual pleasure with him it doesn't matter. What is important is that a woman feels at ease because she needs to enjoy herself.

I've told him, "If you have girlfriends outside you'd better hide them", because I don't like the idea of him having other lovers. Irrespective of knowing that every man or every woman has affairs, they don't have to do it openly. From the very beginning I told him that I don't want there to be two of us, having another woman after he's been with me. No! I want to be the only one and he accepts this.

In the light of my own experience I would like to help other women

A woman is not such a gossip as some people say. But sometimes a woman can't contain her innermost problems. She usually wants to tell a friend or other people in order to get things off her chest. That's what I think. A man on the other hand can dissimulate/fake it/disguise it. For him there is only that moment, then he gets up and leaves; everything disappears. That's why they usually say that men aren't gossips, because a man doesn't need to sound off to anyone.

I feel good and would like to support other women because, in the final analysis, I think I have sufficient experience to be able to help other women who are suffering. Because I've also suffered like that and at least I know how to get over that phase. So I like to help other women and I'm proud when I give advice to women.

Life story 3

ANABELA: I must learn how to survive

Anabela is very shy. A friend asked her to talk to us and she agreed because she was desperate. She needed to hear other people and to feel that she was being understood, so she could regain her self-esteem. She is not sure about anything, she only has doubts, but she is trying to live with dignity. She enjoys her work and it has given her a new purpose in life.

Through this study not only were we able to get to know each other but we also discovered that life gives us countless possibilities and we only need to pluck up courage to make a choice.

She is 45 years old and was born in an urban area. She grew up with her father, her stepmother and her brothers and sisters. She recalls that she had a happy childhood and adolescence. She says she was treated with affection.

She started to teach, albeit without any training. But over time she attended training courses and continued her studies, and today she has a stable professional situation.

At the moment she has no partner; she is living with her six children. Some of the older ones are still studying, and she has serious financial problems due to her non-consensual separation from her husband.

I wanted to talk because I can't take any more stand my problems any longer

I've been a teacher since I was 18 years old. I lived with that man for twenty-six years, twenty-three of which were an official marriage. I had a husband but as time past he became a real womaniser! And whenever he had a woman he walked all over me, he really did. He would rather take care of that woman than his own wife. And if you raised the subject he would just pack his bags and leave. He was the kind who would just leave. He would walk out, saying that he had to go away because of his job, but in fact he was here in town with a woman and would return on Sunday or Monday. I couldn't say anything and if I did he would reply, "I'll start liking you if accept me as I am, accept that I like other women. If you don't you're nothing to me". And despite all my education I couldn't do anything because it had taught me that if a woman chooses a man and is humiliated like this she shouldn't leave him. I couldn't have another man because people would laugh at me, they would think I was a tramp. So I stayed with him all that time, oppressed.

And when I wanted to study he would say: "Go, go and study, and along the way you'll find a man to be your lover". He said that so I wouldn't study, and so I didn't for 15 years. But when we moved to another town I realised that he was seeing another woman. So I took a decision. I was determined to continue my studies. I finished 10th grade and then I got lucky and was able to go away on a teacher-training course. But when I returned I found that he was sleeping with another woman - in front of the children, in my house, in my bedroom. She was also a teacher and had requested a transfer here when we moved. His story was always the same: "If you can't accept what I do then I don't want you. I'll accept you as my wife if you agree to be friends with this woman." I would get angry and tell him, "I won't, I'd rather leave you". But he wouldn't let me leave.

Later I went away for another course in the same place, but it meant that I had to be a boarder, living in a student a hostel. He got down on his knees

and begged me not to go, as if he were doing something good, so I would think he really loved me. But I wouldn't change my mind, I insisted on going. After all that I had seen how could I stop studying? No, I refused. So I went, but he went to the school and argued with the teacher, got aggressive. I couldn't care less, even though from then on the school had me marked. "Your husband has no right to come here and do what he likes, even if he is an important person." I always told them, "I just want to study, ignore him. He doesn't want me to come here and study. He's doing it out of revenge, not jealousy. He doesn't want me to be here".

I carried on. I managed to finish the course and then I returned. I think it was only a little over a year later that he left and came here to study. We weren't on good terms. When he arrived he started to study at the university. He got involved with a woman, and that's how he managed to get a good house. But when he left he said, "Look, I'm going away to study. When I find a house I'll come and fetch you all, OK?"

I replied: "OK." I was always very patient about his misbehaviour. Whenever I got fed up he would say: "You must be very patient, patience will dictate your future, be very patient with me".

Despite everything, despite his lack of respect, I had the children to think of. Where else could I go? No other man would want me in this situation. One of my sons went to visit his father. He was shown the house, but when he went there he found a woman, the same one who lived with him when I was on a course. My son returned and said: "Do you know who Dad is living with?"

I said: "No".

"Dad already has a big house, well furnished, a fridge full of stuff while we're living here in misery. Dad always says he doesn't have any money, he hasn't got any money, yet he's living a good life with that woman."

So I left home and went there without informing him. I waited until it was dark. When I arrived he wasn't in, only that woman was there. She invited me in. When he arrived he said: "Hum.... what are you doing here?"

"I came to see if what I heard was true. I can see that it is. Didn't you say that as soon as you could arrange a house you'd come to get us?"

We stayed there until late and I threatened to stay until dawn, but then I decided to take my son and go to my brother's house. And it was always like that. Whenever I came here he told me to stay with my brother, yet knowing that my husband had a house. And when he got fed up with her he would come to us and say: "Come to my house". When he was alone he would invite his friends to stay there with their lovers, with the result that their wives would go and cause an uproar in our home.

And then one year he said, "You should get a transfer here".

But the real reason was that he wanted a career in politics and needed me to help promote his public image. He continued playing around with other women. He had one who was more permanent, and when she got sick or had a miscarriage I was blamed for being a witch. They went to traditional healers who told them: "This is your wife's fault". The traditional healers were now the main cause of our bad relations because I never had a row with him, not once.

This situation continued until one day he left to go and live with that girl. I remained in the house but he slept at her place everyday. Previously he would only go there on alternate days. I refused to have sex with him because I wanted him to use a condom. Sometimes he would say: "You go and buy condoms".

I replied: "Look, if you don't want to buy them then don't, because I'm not looking for men, it's you who's looking for women. In this house I want a condom; I won't sleep with you without one".

I had been refusing to sleep with him without a condom for some time. This annoyed him because he wanted to make me pregnant or to give me some disease, because that man was always giving me diseases. He was my first husband, my first, and until today I haven't slept with anyone else, and when I caught venereal diseases I didn't even know that it was because of him. But more of that later.

So within a year he left and didn't contribute anything for the support of our six children. I went to see his boss and told him about my problems, that he didn't want to help me, that he was out for revenge, that he accused me of witchcraft because his lover was always having a miscarriage etc. etc. "I don't like these games." That was when his boss said, "I'll have a word with him." I don't know what they talked about. I only know that he said, "I'm doing this because she refuses to tell me how much she earns."

One thing had absolutely nothing to do with the other, but his boss said, "From now on you should show him your salary". I replied, "All right, when I get paid I'll show him." But when we got home he said, "What were you thinking of, to go and complain like that?" Do you think I'll change? I won't."

I went to an organization that defends women. When I arrived there I told them about my problems. He was informed that he should go there for a meeting but the first time he didn't go. The second time he went, and when he arrived he said the same thing, "My problem is that she won't tell me how much she earns." But I knew that the problem was the traditional healer. And when they said: "Anabela, the only problem is that you don't show your husband your salary" I replied, "All right, I'll do that". They said, "From now on you two should get on with each other, sign here". We signed but from then on he didn't return home. He stayed away for a week, and then he turned up. One day, two days away, until one day he took his things and left, without saying good-bye, without saying anything....

He said nothing, nothing. I didn't complain; I remained in my corner. I only called him to ask if he had any information for me. He knew that he was wrong and started to shout. When he's in the wrong he shouts, but when he knows that he's doing the right thing he doesn't. He began to shout: "Ah... Ah... There you go again". My only concern was to know how we were going to live in a rented house, without any support. I was living in a rented house. I didn't know if I was entitled to money for groceries, if I was entitled to maintenance, financial support, how would my children manage to go to school? When he went away we were left without electricity, without money. He's only giving me money now because of the baby.

He submitted papers for a divorce. I was called to testify twice. I don't know how we will divide up our property. I'm afraid because he's a powerful man. When I try to speak he continues to look down on me. He even says: "I refuse to speak to you, speak to my lawyer".

I said: "What are you talking about?"

He replied: "I don't want to speak to you because I have been told, "If you talk to your wife you'll lose your job."

These instructions came from a traditional healer. Other things like that had happened before. One day he came to leave the receipt for the electricity bill and when he got back to the house of the woman he was living with, she claimed she was sick and at death's door. He immediately rushed her to the traditional healer who said: "Oh! Why did you go to your wife's house? You went to your wife's house today. It's your wife who made drugs to kill her". That day I wasn't home, I'd gone out with a friend. When I told her about it she started to laugh: "Look, your husband's crazy. He likes consulting the healer, that's why his life is such a mess".

He took two of our children to live with him. But only for a short time and he's holding them.

I intend to continue with my studies. I should have continued this year but my salary still hadn't been transferred here. Now that I have it I can keep some money back for photocopies. I'm working, studying and taking care of my children. He has to make monthly maintenance payments and in addition I can earn overtime in my teaching.

Being a girl was a little bit more complicated than being a boy

As a girl I was brought up very strictly. Very strictly. And there was no explanation, no education... sexual education didn't exist. The day that I had my first period I didn't know anything about it. I was in the classroom, and when I stood up my colleague said: "Anabela, what's that, you've hurt yourself". Me, "Hurt myself?"

I looked at my overall – in those days we wore an overall to school - "What's this?"

I ran home. My friend said, "Look, you should tell your mother about it, she should know."

When I arrived home I asked my mother, but she only said: "Go and take a shower, I'll call your grandmother."

She didn't tell me anything. She said that I should use a cloth; there were no sanitary towels. That day I was very sad, very sad. My grandmother came around 4 o'clock. My father was already at home and they spoke among themselves. Then she said: "Let's go. We'll tell you all about it in my house."

I went to her house and stayed there for a week; only then did she explain: "It happened because you have grown up. It means that you can't play with men. Tie this ribbon around your waist, pull it and then place the cloth like this. Take the cloth, stretch it more, it must remain hidden. If a bad person

gets hold of that cloth and makes some medicine it is as if you were never born. From now on, if you play with men and then wash the dishes, when you wash the glass your father will get sick, your mother will get sick.”

From then on I was always afraid of meeting men. I didn't have boyfriends. I didn't care about anything. I only wanted to play and so I flirted with men. I preferred to be friends with boys but didn't get too close to them much because I was afraid. But they never spoke about pregnancy, about sex. They didn't explain sexual life although a person could have some idea. How I don't know.

My girl friends didn't count because they didn't know. I thought that in order to have a baby you had to kneel and pray in church. I thought it was like that. A woman with a big belly for me it didn't exist. There was just one friend, younger than me but I think she knew about life. She used to say: “Anabela, ask your mother how babies are made. It's not the way you think.” But she didn't say what she meant.

That was how I grew up. But I began to understand that when you did that you got pregnant. I married early because I thought that just by leaning against a man I would no longer be a virgin. When I was going out with him, if I dated another man I would no longer be a virgin. I would be worthless. That's why I stuck to him. I even had a friend who said, “Leave that man, leave him. Don't stay with him. He's bad”

I met him at school, in a cultural group where we rehearsed dances and songs. I got to know him there and whenever I wanted to end it he'd say “If I ever catch you in the street I'll beat you”. And I was afraid.

He used to go out with other girls, but there was a time when he stopped. I think he did it in order to achieve his objective of getting me pregnant and holding on to me. When he wanted to have sex I refused. I thought about what I'd been told and refused. And in addition my grandmother was keeping an eye on me.

I was still a virgin when we got engaged and then we got married. We started to live together before we were married and we had a son. We lived together as husband and wife for 3 years and then got married officially. That was 22 years ago.

But to get back to the courting days, when we began dating I was still in secondary school. We started to date but then I had doubts. I had a friend, a very close friend, the one I already mentioned. She also didn't like his abusive behaviour and she was always saying: "Anabela, that husband of yours is a nasty piece of work." What people say now is what she said then. Now she lives abroad and is married. She said: "Don't stay with him, don't date him, don't marry him now."

But I thought that after dating him, after he had touched me, if I went to someone else I would be a prostitute. That's the traditional education... But he had a gift that I admired. Once we separated for a week but then he threatened me with a broom: "If you get me all worked up I'll hit you, I'll hit you."

I stayed with him out of fear until we got married. But it was also love. I liked him very much. Now I don't know, but at that time I liked him.

There was no respect in our marriage

After we were married problems started to arise because of his group. They always went out together, to dances, and he would flirt with girls in front of me. I always went because he liked to show me off. Then he would do that. I think he did it to humiliate me. He didn't have any consideration for woman, not just me, all women. Once I was in a meeting, I think we were preparing for the Beijing conference, and we were organising a march. He commented: "What's all this for? Do you think you'll be like us? Do you

think you'll move forwards? We'll always trample all over you, you'll never succeed."

He didn't only despise me, he despised all women. Just that gesture, that attitude of picking on that moment of the women's movement, shows a lack of respect first for society and then for his family and women in general. Because he thinks that - as a man -can do what he likes with a woman. He even says: "You're a married woman who doesn't go out with other men? What kind of married woman is that? All women have lovers, all of them! There are no women who don't have lovers, it's a lie".

I just looked at him: "It's not true. There are women who don't have lovers, who only know their husband. There are women who don't play around."

He replied: "That's not true; it's not true."

That was because he was part of a group that led that kind of life, or had women who lived like that. And those women led him to believe that we women, even when married, go out with other men. He himself got involved with married women.

There was one long period when he stopped going out with other women - when we were dating. I said I would stop seeing him so he behaved himself until we were married, when he got what he wanted. But after I had a baby he started again, whenever we went to a party he would flirt in front of me. Sometimes I would leave and go home alone on foot no matter how far it was.

The others, his friends, saw everything but he didn't care. He doesn't care about anyone's opinion. Even today he doesn't respect anyone's opinion. If you knew him you would reach the same conclusion. He received a lot of advice, a lot, but didn't accept it. He would say, "I don't take advice from anyone". When he was teaching, even his students. He would say: "You

shouldn't listen to anyone's advice. You should make up your own mind." He's like that.

For him our first son meant that I was sure to stick with him.

As regards the children, the first one was planned and so was the second. But the second was planned due to his pressure. When our first son was one year old he wanted another. It took time for me to get pregnant and he said: "I don't know why you're not getting pregnant. I want another son". Our third child, born two years later, was not planned. I tried to have an abortion but couldn't. And then the others came later.

I was on the pill and he agreed. But while I was at the training centre I stopped because I was afraid he might suspect I was taking it because I had a lover. In order to show him that I wasn't with anyone I stopped taking the pill and that was when I had my last child, the sixth. Sometimes I was able to have an abortion through the health service. On these occasions my husband had to give his written agreement.

My husband is aggressive, stupid. He can get aggressive even when he only suspects something. Once he attacked one of my colleagues but my colleague just ignored him because there was nothing. He just started to laugh and said: "Your husband is off his rocker. He just wants to humiliate you. There's nothing going on between us, we just talk to each other as colleagues."

He used to say, "You play around and I play around. OK?" But it wasn't true. He was very jealous. Just knowing that I sometimes talked to the parent of a pupil or a colleague was enough for him to cause a commotion. Once he told a colleague to come to our house, a colleague I used to talk to. He's a very simple person. He never asked me to be his lover; I just liked talking to him as an administrative person. One day my husband said: "Go and fetch that colleague of yours, the one you spend a lot of time talking to. So I went and told him, "My husband wants to talk to you", but I didn't

explain anything, I didn't say anything about the commotion. He wasn't worried because he always thought my husband was nuts.

My husband arrived and said: "You two can be lovers, you can fuck each other".

The teacher didn't say a word, he just laughed: "Your husband's really nuts." He turned around and left and the next day he began to laugh: "Your husband isn't right in the head."

I replied: "You're right".

How can he slander a woman like you, who has done nothing wrong".

Once he went for a parent who was letting me buy things in the shop where he was manager. This was around 1983, 1986 when there were shortages of everything. His niece was in my class so he used to let me buy things in his shop as it received special supplies.

He went to the man's house and said, "You're involved with my wife" and a load of other stuff. He banged on the door and then kicked it so hard he broke it and hurt his foot so badly it took a long time to heal. The only thing the man did was to seek out one of my relatives to tell them, "If that lady wasn't well educated or if she wasn't my niece's teacher, I'd killed that man. I feel sorry for her, having such a stupid husband. I would kill that man".

So I stopped talking to him and he stopped talking to me because my husband had damaged his house.

Although he created some scenes at school fortunately this didn't affect my job because nobody paid any attention to him.

I often felt abused

He always went out on Fridays. When he didn't feel well, when he was sick, sometimes I also caught the disease. I didn't know what it was because I hadn't seen it before. "It's itching a lot. "

He would reply: "What are you on about?"

"I don't know, I never saw anything like it ... a rash, I don't know what's wrong, what it means". I think it was around the time I had my second son".

"What? Did you do something?"

But I hadn't been with anyone else. He started to laugh and said: "Let's go to the hospital". We went, but the nurse didn't explain what it was. He was very smart. He didn't want the nurse to explain where the disease came from. She treated us and that was it. The next time I was ill he gave me the injections himself at home.

I had that disease many times and I didn't know what it was. I only discovered recently that I had STD. Only now! I found out that, believe it or not, I had a STD and I think that was the reason I started to have problems. When I went to hospital to have an HIV/AIDS test they explained that it is difficult for a woman to know because it often remains in the organism a long time before breaking out. I never imagined that it was a disease and from then on I decided to have regular treatment and not sleep with him without a condom. Maybe that was why he eventually decided to leave me. But at the time he agreed.

I went to have an AIDS test because I was scared about him getting involved with a lot of different girls. While he was here he was with a girl who not only went with him but also other men and she was also young. He can have two girlfriends at the same time, two or more, and he chooses which one he wants.

While we were married he didn't force me to have sex with him. At least that's what I thought. But when I was ill and he wanted it, even if I didn't want it had to be. I had to understand why; it was because of my traditional education. They said that when he wants it you must let him have it. When you are sick but not very sick you must satisfy your husband otherwise you'll cause problems in the home. And I did. I didn't see it as a form of aggression.

When I started to live with him my grandmother explained how I should treat my husband. If I was menstruating I should put a red cloth on my pillow so he would understand. As a man he had also had that kind of education. I was afraid of explaining. I would say, "I'm like this, I'm not well", because it's shameful to speak about it.

Before I got married and after I got engaged my grandmother didn't want me to marry him. . She called him a scoundrel and other things, and said I shouldn't marry him. She said, "Mm, he's a villain, I don't want you to marry him because he's a villain. You're a very quiet person, he's crafty and he'll dominate you." When he heard about it he was angry, "That grandmother of yours..."

There wasn't much physical aggression in our relationship. There was the case of him sometimes wanting sex when I was ill, but not always. There was some physical aggression of the slapping kind. He would go out and come home late and I would wait for him at the dinner table. Sometimes I fell asleep at the table. If I decided to sleep in the bedroom I couldn't hear the doorbell. He would ring the bell and would have to get in into the house through a small outside window. He would jump down and bang on the door. It made me jump and as soon as he came in he would slap me. "Why didn't you open the door?" It was like that.

He didn't take his key He didn't want to because he wanted to wake me up. I had to wake up to wait on him, to serve him dinner. He came home for his

dinner. Then I saw that when he arrived he wanted sex. I didn't know that he was bringing a disease did I?

The relations between our two families were never very good

He believes in traditional healers because his family does. They like traditional healers; they'll call one for even the smallest thing.

My relationship with my mother-in-law was difficult. When we started living together he was 18 and didn't pay any attention to what his mother said. Throughout the time we were living together he ignored what his mother said we were fine. But when he started to listen to his mother there was big trouble at home. I don't think she ever liked me. Why, only she knows.

Older women said, "It's because you never accepted what she wanted". Sometimes I dreamt that she came and gave me things, but I hit her. I didn't know why. I told an old lady and she said, "Your mother-in-law must be one of those" and that she wanted me to work with her at night. That's what they said.

I asked: "But what did she want me to do?"

"Your dream can be explained by tradition. As you don't accept the things she gives you in your dream then she starts to call you a witch" - because she called me a witch. That's why she calls you a witch, because you don't accept the work she gives you. You don't know and so she calls you a witch in order to get rid of you."

And her son leaves me because I'm a witch. And indeed she does say that I'm a witch. That's it. I have a mother-in-law who pretends to be good but behind my back she tells her son that he should leave me because I'm a witch.

My mother-in-law's attitude didn't change even after I had children. It didn't change anything because she couldn't be sure that her grandchildren were the children of her son. She could only be sure that her daughters' children were her real grandchildren, but not her son's children. And in fact after they were born she looked them over, checking for any sign to prove it. She never loved those children. Never! Whenever she wanted them it was out of her own selfish interest. If you went there with a bag of bread, with a little money or a chicken or anything you would be well received. If one day you went with empty hands she would ask: "What did you come here for? Did your father leave something for me?"

Because before my husband got promoted to an important position they weren't allowed to stay there, they were sent home.

Traditional education teaches that when your husband mistreats you, behaves badly, you must go and speak to his family. You mustn't complain to your own family because they will be upset and the only solution will be for you to leave and go back home. What did I do? I always presented the problems to his parents and they would say: "We'll speak to him, we'll have a word with him". One day I decided to put the two families together. I explained what was going on but after his father heard what I had to say he concluded that there shouldn't be any meeting between the two families. They would talk to him because they concluded that their son was the guilty party. It would be a shameful to make the problem public.

He never had any reason to complain about me, and when I presented these problems he kept quiet because he knew that I hadn't done anything wrong. But I was tempted during my life. Not here, it was when I went away to take a course. I was with a man who liked me a lot. But he was respectful because he knew I was married. Now I regret that I didn't accept. There was also a doctor who liked me, but I didn't like him.

My family didn't approve of my marriage

My grandmother was a very strong willed woman, very strong. She was alive when my children were born. The problem was that even today my husband believes in sorcery, even today, and he wouldn't let me go to her house often, because she would bewitch my children. And they couldn't eat anything from her house, my grandmother's house, not even cooked rice. For example, whenever he had hiccoughs he would immediately say it was "her fault." And I also stopped seeing much of her....I wouldn't accept her gifts when she was so fond of giving presents, "Go and give these to my grandchildren."

My grandmother was a very good woman. She taught me, she showed that we should live closely together as family. It was thanks to her that I got to know this town. I got to know many people because of her. When she was about to die she said, "I'll be leaving soon, you must learn how to work with traditional roots." She cured people who ate sand and got a big belly, she cured that disease very well. Then she said: "Don't you want to keep a bit of sorcery?" I said: "No, grandmother, I don't."

She knew some magic and used to say, "You may be a teacher but you're stupid, an ass. I'm smarter than you who married that villain without being able to see what he's really like, but I knew immediately that he was a villain". He never wanted to be less; he always said that I was worth much more.

She saw what he was like. I didn't say anything to her but she was watching. She observed him when I was away because I used to go there often, but after I got married we no longer had those frequent conversations. I couldn't visit my family. He controlled where I went. I couldn't take my children on a visit. Sometimes he said: "Go alone". Even when my father became ill I couldn't go and see him often, nor when my brother was sick. Sometimes I went secretly to take care of my father, my brother. My father had

thrombosis and sometimes needed someone to be with him, but he wouldn't let me go.

My father didn't like him. He showed another face to my father but my father made it clear that he didn't like him. He talked with him but he also told him that he was a scoundrel. He said, "You're a scoundrel, you'll mistreat my daughter".

My husband never liked it when I left the house, never. Whenever I threatened to leave he wouldn't let me. Today, looking back at his attitude I realise that he didn't really like me. He only wanted to have someone who would satisfy his needs. Now that he thinks he's got what he wanted, he leaves without saying a word. That's what we're seeing now.

Their father has a strong influence over my children. I'm trying to put an end to this, because I have a son who can have two or three girlfriends at the same time. I have two others who like to play around but I say: "That kind of life is no good, I won't permit it".

I was always pressured not to have girlfriends

My best friendships were at school rather than among my neighbours, maybe because I was very shy and didn't say much. At school it was different, maybe because we were together in class. I don't know why but I was closer to those girls. They think I'm a simple person, my only problem is that I don't say much.

He liked to be with his friends, but never liked me being with my friends, never. Even up to the day he left he used to say, "You've got bad advisers. You don't have good advisers." But when I think about it I realise that I hadI have good advisers because there were always saying, "It won't cause a fuss, sit here, just keep your children."

He never liked me to have girlfriends. Why? Because he was afraid I would ask them questions, “My husband does this and that, he says this to me and tells me that. What about your husbands? Do they say the same things?”

Whenever he went out with another woman he would come back and tell me. One day I told his sister. She said: “Oh! You must never allow that; if necessary slap his face. You must, you can’t ever allow such things”. That was his sister.

His mother once also told me the same thing. And I spoke to him but he didn't like it. He said, “You see? They’re giving you bad advice. From now on I’m going to have problems at home”. Because he liked to go out and then come and tell me about it, as if it wouldn’t bother me.

But I couldn’t have a friend and couldn’t ask advice from such a woman. He was used to seeing me work-home, work-home. He never liked my friends, because of his playing around. He thought that my friends would tell me what he was up to, but that wasn’t the case. For example, when I went away on a course he lived here at home with his lover, but neither my children nor my neighbours told me anything about it. I don't know if they were afraid, or if he convinced them not to, but he didn’t have to convince the neighbours. They were afraid of him because he was violent. I found out he had put a woman there because I had a dream. I dreamed he was shouting and running away with a woman, while I ran after him whimpering.

He would wake me up: “Why are you screaming?”

“I’m screaming because I was running after you, and you were running away with a woman. Who is this woman? You were coming out of this house. First I dreamt that you were running away with a very small woman. I couldn’t see her face. Then you appeared with a woman holding a baby. You were crying and asking me to receive the woman and the child. Who is she?”

Two or three days later he explained: “While you were away I lived here with a woman. I told your uncles that she was a friend of mine, but I’ll end it one day”.

“And what about that woman with a child?”

“I have a child. She wanted to come and leave the child here. I told her not to, because that would cause problems and I would have to leave the child in an orphanage”.

I wouldn’t let him sleep for a month. I wasn’t so angry about his having a son. What made me much more angry was the fact that he brought his lover into the house and in the presence of my children. I shouted so much he ended up calling me a “*xerifa*”. He said, “I’ve never seen you so angry”. But I shouted a lot. I couldn’t sleep for a month; it stopped me from sleeping. As soon as we were in the bedroom (I didn’t want to do it in front of the children) I would start talking. I talked and I talked. I told him everything that I had inside me.

He said, “Let me sleep, I’m very tired and tomorrow I have to work”.

I would say: “No, you don’t have to go to work right now. You can have a shower in the morning and then go to work”.

I went to sleep around five o’clock in the morning. When I woke up I would wake him; he was still sleepy but he had to go to work. One day somebody at work asked me: “What’s up with your husband?”

“What is it? What did he say?”

“He said he had malaria”.

I said: “Yes, that’s right”. But he didn’t have malaria (she laughs) he just couldn’t sleep, he couldn’t sleep.

As regards sex he said it was better at home. He felt better at home than somewhere else. The only thing he didn't like was my salary. I wasn't earning much. He said his lovers earned more than he did. That's what he said. From then on I never showed him my salary. Never. And he didn't ask to see it even though later he complained about something he had never said.

My work is very important to me

I almost refused to be a teacher. It all started with a shortage of teachers here in Mozambique in 1976. In 1977 I went to a Teacher Training Centre. We were the first teachers to be trained by Frelimo in 1977.

It was difficult for me to adapt but at the time the government threatened to arrest anyone who didn't obey. And in time I started to like it. After the course I went to do politico-military training. After that I was assigned to my first school. I taught primary school, all subjects in grades 1, 2 and 3. Each class had 75 pupils and we had to teach in the morning and in the afternoon. Then I went to another school where I only taught grade 4.

Even when my husband was transferred I carried on working as a teacher. Despite my difficulties I took all the courses that were available. I'm now a trained middle level teacher and I don't intend to stop. I want to continue with my studies, perhaps next year, because I still don't have a salary.

My work has always been very important to me; it has helped me a lot. Because everything I have is mine, my friendships, communication, everything is because of my work. With the load of problems I have at home I don't know what it would have been like if it weren't for my work. Maybe I would have been older or even dead. Because I might have problems at home but in school I'm with the children, I'm laughing, I'm

playing. But as soon as I arrive home... When I leave home I feel good, that's why it's important to work.

My husband never wanted me to carry on developing my work. But I continued my studies. He always wanted me to keep me at the bottom of the pile, not earning much. He wasn't so much against my work as against my evolution. When I went away to study I think he regretted it because in reality what he didn't want me to go. But he was the one who said that I should go.

I met many teachers who became my friends and even during the holidays I didn't stay at home. I was always working in the districts with other teachers and he didn't like that. And I even managed to earn a bit extra.

I find it difficult to understand why men act like that

What I had to endure no man would not have endured. That's what I think. No man would be able to put up with it.

Even now he is still trying to control me from a distance. He may even have the police watching me. Sometimes he says, "You old women, it's difficult to catch you out."

He thinks he can deceive me. He says, "A married man who doesn't go out and play the field is nothing, and his wife should too. She should have a lover so that her husband can feel like a man". But it's just a trick to see if I will... Except that I'm smart: "I'm no child nor am I a fool. If you think I should go out looking for someone find yourself another woman who will. I won't debase myself with just anyone."

He said that he wanted me to play around, he said it on various occasions. Once he even wrote it down in a document stating that I could play around. It was a kind of authorization. I wanted to show it to my father but then he

tore it up and burned it. That was a long time ago; we'd been together for less than ten years.

I try. I've always tried not to be ashamed, not to get upset when I hear that people are saying bad things about me. But even now I don't know what he has gone around saying to some leaders so that they look down on me. I feel they despise me. I feel uneasy.

Men today are always having affairs with other women, and our conversations are always, "What if he gives us that disease, if he gives us that disease" (AIDS). The problem is just that – affairs. It's a problem that always leads a man to leave his family and get involved with other women.

I don't know why they do this. Perhaps even they themselves don't know. I know I can't explain why men do it. When they are talking among themselves they say, "All women are the same". They always say this. Most of them say: "All women are the same. You should never think that the woman I was with is better than me". If that's the case I don't know why they play around. If we are all equal what makes them behave like that? Why are they so curious if we're all the same?

Maybe it's lack of care and affection. But I think we all give them care and affection. We do everything for them. We wash their clothes, we take care of their children, we do everything. In my opinion he's just a villain, he's just a villain. One day my husband said, "I'm always at home, but my friends have told me, "Starting from today, you can't always stay at home. If you're always at home it's because that woman is giving you something, either that or you're spoiling her". So, my dear lady, as of today I'm going out to have some fun. I won't come straight home from work. I'll have a bit of fun first and then I'll come home". From that day on he did just that. At the time we'd been married for about 7 years, I think. About 6 or 7 years. That's how he started to sleep out and doing all those things.

If one day he should want to return he can. It's his home and his children are there. But I can't accept him; he's hurt me too much.

I must rebuild my life, although I don't know how. He says, "No man will like any woman that I leave behind." I don't have a suitor, I don't know whether there's one hiding somewhere, who can't approach me and tell me what he feels. Nobody comes to ask me anything. And in any case I don't want anyone. I'm still very upset; I don't want that. Perhaps in 4 or 5 years time. For the time being I just want to take care of my children and they are very jealous. They are always saying: "Mummy, we're your husband, we don't want any other man in our home". They don't want to hear about other men, they're very jealous. Their father is also very jealous. He's always trying to find out what I'm going to do, to hear what people are saying about me.

To be honest, recently I've sometimes felt ashamed. I feel as though I'm worthless. Because it isn't possible to be abandoned in this way without a reason. So I feel ashamed to be among people. Some people say, "Who invited that woman? She was discarded; what's she doing here? I know they're being nasty - I can see it in their faces.

One Year Later

It seems as though I've been on a long journey, so many things have happened. But I'm still here.

Firstly, it was the court case. He submitted a request for separation and as I didn't give my consent there was an investigation. I don't want to say much about this. It was difficult because my husband called his family and friends to tell them that I was always a bad wife. That I didn't even take care of my children. I can't tell you what I felt, seeing my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law telling these lies. It was a very humiliating. And in court what they said counted. In this country justice belongs to those who have power, no

matter that they smear the name of a woman like me, without influence and without money.

But now I know I have finally got a place in the university, and I like it. It's good for me. My friends have given me strength. If I'm still here talking to you it's because they encouraged me. No-one can destroy me in any way because I'm a fighter.

The only thing that really hurts is that I couldn't keep my children. The older ones, who are studying, are always phoning me to say I just have to wait a while, that when they finish their studies we'll all be together again. They even took my youngest child and I know that sometimes he cries all night for his mother. And where he is he can't even speak my name. He can only pour his heart out to his brothers and sisters. When I get my life organized I'll go and fight to get him back.

I don't need the things that were rightfully mine. I'll put everything in the name of my children, I'll give them everything. As for me, I want to start over with my work, as I've have always done. I recall that at one time my husband didn't have a job and I had to support my family. I can start over. No problem. I'm strong.

Life Story 4

JULIA: I feel that I have managed to clear my path

Julia is a grandmother. She is a simple person with little education yet full of knowledge acquired from the "school of life". Although her language does not observe any rules it is poetic. She can even convey the wealth of metaphors contained in her maternal language. With its unmet needs and misery her life is no different to that of many Mozambican women. And she feels that it is being replicated in her own daughter and in many daughters throughout the country.

We are not telling her story because she became a good friend. We are telling the "secrets in her heart" because we know they could be of interest to other women who are thinking about changing their lives. Julia understands clearly and is proud that she has been able to open doors that seemed closed to her grandchildren. Her strength is based on the security of her rights as a woman given to her by her father and that have enabled her to move forward on her own. She does work that was often reserved for men and has the right to control the land she inherited from her father, circumstances that have marked her life and are giving her the prospect of security in her old age. Thank you very much Julia for your inestimable contribution.

Julia doesn't know how old she is because she lost her original identity card. She was born, grew up and lived part of her adult life in rural areas. Her father was a miner and her mother a peasant farmer. She married and had one child that she subsequently lost when she left her husband.

Who I am. The story of my mother

I was born in the street. I was born under a mango tree just before my mother reached the hospital. I was born at four o'clock in the morning.

My mother was on her way to hospital with my aunt but there wasn't enough time. She had to stop under a mango tree where she gave birth to me. That is how I got my name, because the lady who owned the mango tree had a child called Julia. She came out and said, "You're lucky, I have a daughter too so I'll name the baby after my daughter - Julia". So my mother went off to the hospital with the name Julia and my aunt. She didn't change a thing, she didn't add anything. I'm just Julia because that was how I was born.

My mother got married when she was young. My mother was taken in by my aunt, when she visited my mother's village. My mother was suffering a lot – not enough to eat, no clothes; her whole life was upside down. So my aunt went to speak to her, "Listen, my brother is in South Africa. If you agree I'll take you to his house, because he needs a wife. He said that he must find a girl". So because she was so poor and because she had just lost a girl (her first child was a girl) my mother ending up in an even worse situation because of my stepfather, who was in South Africa. She didn't say anything, she just accepted.

So she spoke with my aunt. My aunt stole my mother and took her to live in another place. When my father returned they presented her, "We've found a girl for you. She's from such and such family, in such and such place, the daughters of so and so." So my father accepted saying, "I like the girl, she's pretty". That's what my father said when he received my mother. So my mother stayed there in my father's house. No bride price was paid for my mother because my father was a bit confused. And he hit her a lot....

He hit my mother and he hit my other mothers, because she was not alone. His first wife left him because she was being beaten; the second left because

he was spending a lot of time in South Africa. People in the area used to say, "Your husband's good because he beats his wives".

So my mother went there and everything was fine for a while. She got pregnant with her first child, a boy, but he died. That's when the trouble started.

He started to hit her. When he was drunk, he used to hit my mother. He wouldn't stop even when my aunts, my grandmother asked him to. He didn't hit her because he disliked her. He treated her well, gave her clothes to wear and gave her food to eat. The problems always started when he got drunk.

My mother put up with it. She got pregnant for the second time and a third time in my father's house and my older brother André was born. And still she stayed there. She put up with all that trouble. She worked in the fields. My father stopped going to South Africa because he had bought a mill. He had bought oxen and things so that he no longer had to bend over when working in the fields. So it seems that after he had got all these things, he decided that he wouldn't go back to South Africa anymore because it was a waste of time. He stayed at home with his wife and another woman, my stepmother, who appeared along the way.

She remained there and got pregnant again, this time with me. My mother left when I was about three years old. I became very confused because I grew up without knowing my real mother, without knowing who my real mother was, is she this one or that one? I had no idea.

Why did my mother leave? My father was a drunk. Our shacks weren't the kind that had solid walls, sometimes they had holes. One day my father was asleep; that day he was sleeping at the back. Then a cat came and climbed over the wall. Instead of falling somewhere else, he fell on top of my father who was asleep below. The cat scratched him and he got very angry. When he awoke, he didn't say anything. He just woke my mother and started to hit

her. He hit her again and again for several days. Then my mother managed to escape/ and ran to my uncle's house that was close by.

When she arrived she knocked on the door of my aunt's house, my namesake. She started to ask what had happened. My mother said, "I was beaten because a cat got into the house. He beat me so I want to go back home to my parents".

Then my namesake said, "Julia is still small".

"I'm tired of always being beaten by my husband. I can't take any more".

"All right, we'll see about it in the morning", said my uncle, the husband of my namesake.

When morning came my father looked for my mother but she was hiding in that house. Then they arranged some money, "All right, go home to your father. I'll send some people to resolve the problem because now he's gone too far, creating all this uproar. You've had three children in his house but he still gets angry, gets drunk. Let him knock someone else around."

So she got the bus and went back home taking me and my brother with her. He came with us. We arrived at my grandparent's house and stayed there for a month. In the second month my uncle sent some people so that my father to fetch us and mother. But mother said "I'm never going back there because one day you'll kill me".

My father said, "No, I won't beat you any more. I'll stop drinking, I will stop doing all those things".

"I won't go".

So my grandparents said, "No. You must pay bride price".

He replied, "You must give me my children". So she agreed to hand us over to father. We returned with him".

Brideprice had to be paid if mother was to go back to him with us. But when we got back home father didn't organize the brideprice he had to pay for mother. She was all mixed up, very mixed up. He said, "I don't want her back because she brings bad luck, all this commotion is her fault".

I never saw my mother again. I only saw her when I was grown up. I heard about her because neighbours started to tell me her story. My uncle, her brother, used to come and visit us. Then the whole world was talking about the fact that our mother was alive and from then on I wanted to know how she was. My father had died and I was living with my uncle, my father's brother. I was grown up, 15 years old. Our neighbour said, "Your mother is alive, your mother is so and so. This woman is not your mother, she's your aunt. She isn't your real mother, the one who gave birth to you. Your mother's in such and such a place and her father is so and so".

I said, "How am I going to find this lady? Because for such a long time I thought my mother was so and so and now I she is someone else. My head's in a whirl. What is she like?"

Then the neighbour said, "Your grandfather used to come and visit you. But there wasn't the kind of affection that made people accept your uncle as part of your mother's family. He was grandfather because he was here in the house. But there was no heartfelt affection and sense of feeling good because my uncle, my mother's brother has arrived".

I talked a lot and asked my grandfather, "Are you my mother's brother?"

He said that he was. And that my mother was alive.

"But why doesn't she come to visit us?"

He said, "Ah, she won't come because she's a very angry with your father".

I said, "All right, but I want to know my mother. How can I get to know her? No problem, uncle, just visit us and go home when you're done. I just wanted to know if my mother is alive or dead like my father".

Then I went back to my neighbour's house for some days because she had a lover who knew my mother and knew where she was living.

I told the neighbour, "I want to go and live with my mother. How can I get there? How will I travel? My uncle didn't tell me how to get there".

The neighbour said, "You haven't got any money".

I said, "No, I haven't, but Ill go and pick cashew nuts and sell them and then I'll have money".

She said, "All right".

I picked cashew nuts, sold them and got some money. Then that man told me how to get there. Now, how can I leave, because my uncle will say that they can't do without me. So what am I going to say?

So I said, "I'll say that I'm going to my sister's house, my cousin who lives in another place. When they ask me I won't tell anyone, in case my secret comes out. I'll say that I'm going to my sister's house for four days and then I'll be back. My uncle would be angry if he knew that I was going to look for my mother. I knew this because he used to say that I don't want either of you two saying that you need your mother. No one can leave this house. If you do and I find out I'll beat you to death. So my brother André and I decided that we wouldn't talk about mother. Even if that uncle came we couldn't say anything to him.

I organized the journey and caught the bus. Our neighbour came with me part of the way, showed me the bus, and explained, "When you arrive at that place you must get out in the town and turn towards the sun. Walk for a while, past the airport and when houses start to appear ask the way". Okay. I caught the bus, arrived in the town, and walked until I saw the houses. It was getting late and I started to ask for the house of Mr. so and so, a traditional healer".

They told me it was late and that I should stay there until morning. They would wake me in the morning and go with me to show me the way because the town was very big. All right. I had already been travelling for two days, sleeping on the way. The problem was that I had to return within four days. I slept immediately and woke up in the morning,. They gave me a bucket of water and I bathed. They gave me food and money. Then they told a boy to go with me, leave me in x and then come back.

We walked and walked and arrived at the place indicated by his father. "This is the place. You just have to follow this road until you see a big tree in front of you, with coconut trees at the side. Turn right and follow the path to the church. The house you want is there.

"Really? Thank you."

I walked and walked and walked. I arrived at the place and said, "This is the tree and this is the path." I turned and went to the house but when I arrived my mother wasn't there. She had gone away on a business trip, a long way away. I only found my father, her second husband. When I arrived, my father didn't even know me and I didn't know him. The uncle who used to come and visit us didn't live there. He lived in my grandfather's house, my mother's father. I went there and said, "I'm looking for the house of Mr. so and so".

He said, "This is it". As he was a traditional healer he thought that I had gone to him for assistance. I just stood there.

I just stood there and said, "Uncle, don't you recognize me. I'm the daughter of so and so, who got married in this house. I'm Julia, the daughter she left behind".

He said, "So you're the girl she misses so much and who makes her cry every day".

I said, "Yes I am".

And he started to ask me questions, "And Andre?"

I said, "He stayed at home". André was afraid of being beaten and even said "I'll tell uncle if he asks me".

I said, "Andre, if you tell uncle he'll beat you as well."

"You'll get lost".

I said, "I won't get lost. If I can't find her I'll come back".

He said, "Will you manage to get back in four days?"

I said, "I'll be back. You'll see. I'll be back."

But getting back to my story, my mother arrived later that day. I had bathed and was having something to eat. My father, my second father, said "We won't say anything, doesn't say a word, you hear?"

I said I wouldn't say anything. My brother and sister (they had a girl and a boy) weren't there either. My mother arrives home and bathes. We are in the kitchen because it's cold and the stove keeps us warm. She has something to eat, drinks some tea and then starts to greet me, "Good evening, how are you?"

I said, "I'm fine, how are you?"

"I'm also fine".

We both remained silent. Then my father asked my mother, "That daughter of yours, Julia, who lives far away, if she appeared here would you recognize her?"

She said, "No, I wouldn't because when I left she was very small".

"And what about André?"

She said, "Nor André, I've no idea what he looks like. But I would recognize his voice, because he has a very soft voice and always spoke very quietly. I would recognize André because of that. Why do you ask?"

I said, "Just something to say".

And we carried on chatting, sometimes saying nothing, until he said "This is your daughter".

She said, "This girl here? You're crazy, you're crazy."

I said, "No mother. I'm your daughter Julia".

Instead of being happy, my mother cried and cried and cried. I was amazed. Why was she crying? I came here because I miss my mother and she starts to cry? Why is she crying? I thought, "This lady isn't right in the head". I remained quiet for a while and then I said "I left there to come here to ask questions, to get to know you, so you could know that I'm alive, I'm not dead. My brother André is well, has no problems. My older brother is in Maputo, my other sister is a nurse, and another is with her mother. And I'm

here. But I must go back the day after tomorrow, because I spent a whole day travelling to get here".

I returned to visit my mother, but in my heart I didn't like her. I liked her because she was my mother and gave birth to me. But I was hurt because she went away and left me alone with my father, which was not easy. My father wouldn't let me go to school because my step mother wouldn't have it.

My mother used to visit me here, but I didn't tell her my innermost secrets and the hurt has never really gone away. Even when she was sick she never sent for the children she'd left behind.

She only had bad things to say about my father. I understand that she had to leave, but not that she left me behind while I was a baby. But I went to her funeral. When we arrived, she was already in her grave. No-one called us.

The worst of it is that I did the same thing as my mother. I fled the pain and left my daughter Julieta behind. She suffered just as I did. My daughter also used to feel bitter towards me, although she's got over it now. Only my grand children are as they should be. I feel I've been able to open the door that was closed with my mother.

How I grew up

After my mother left, we stayed with our stepmother. We stayed with our step mother. After that, can you imagine the accident that occurred? After I was weaned I suddenly became ill. My feet didn't want to walk. If I'd remained with my mother I would have been able to walk all right. I was three years old, four years old and still couldn't walk. What could it be? My family started to investigate why I didn't walk, why my feet would start to get twisted. I could only crawl. They went to traditional healers and did everything they could to make me walk. Then I started to walk. I was five

years old, walking like a five-year-old. I was able to go from the house to the river from the river to wherever. So I remained there, walking, weeding, working in the fields, going to the river or wherever I was sent as a child.

I was almost six when I started to work in the fields. My father didn't like anyone who stayed behind and didn't work in the fields. I went to do a bit of weeding and then came back, did some weeding and came back. I came home with my stepmother. She was not one of those nasty stepmothers. She was a good mother and she must have felt that she was my mother because she treated me well. She never hit me once. By that time I was four I just knew that this is good, that is not good. She didn't beat me. So I stayed all those years with my stepmother, six years, seven years with out any problem.

My father wouldn't allow me to go to school. I don't know if he used to fly off the handle because of his drinking, because of working in the fields, because my mother left him. He didn't even remember that the two of us, me and Andre, should go to school. So we stayed home, working in the fields, learning to plough with an ox.

Whenever we were there father said, "You must use the plough for weeding. I don't want to hear anything about being a child, because if I die you'll suffer even though you have two oxen.

So, we learned. By then I was eight years old.

When I was nearly eight my cousin, the daughter of my uncle, came to speak to my father. She said that she needed me to go to Beira to take care of her baby. As father knew that I had no mother, and he thought my cousin had a good heart he handed me over to her. Then my father said, "You must send your sister to school".

My cousin agreed but she was lying because she didn't send me to school. When we arrived in Beira I took care of the baby but it wasn't well, the

baby was sick. When he was born he looked like a snake. His feet and bones didn't bend, they remained rigid. So I had to take care of that baby until he was two years old. My cousin was the worst person in my life, I'll never forget her; she was the worst. When I was with my father, everything was fine, with my stepmother and all my family. My father didn't beat me, or insult me; he never insulted me. He only taught me things that I could do according to my own strength. When I was able to do something I did it; if I couldn't I didn't have to. He just said, "You must make an effort to succeed, that's the life of a woman. You must work so you can live".

If something was heavy or something else then I would tell him. Although sometimes I didn't say anything because I was afraid. When he was drunk I thought that if I answered him back he would hit me.

My cousin didn't let me sleep. She made me a slave in her house. I had to wake up at zero hours or at any time to be with the baby, to keep the baby quiet, to prepare food for the baby. I had to wake up at four o'clock in the morning to go and buy bread for her husband's breakfast before he went to work. I would heat water for her husband to bathe, and even so she would hit me. I didn't go to school, I wasn't well treated, I didn't eat properly; I didn't have any decent clothes. So one day I was so upset I reacted and ran away. I thought, "If I stay here they'll kill me".

Wanting to run away. How I got to know the father of my daughter Julieta

When I met Julieta's father it was not of my own free will. It was through my father. He died when I was 10 years old. When my father died I went to stay with my uncle. Then he took me and André to stay with my aunt. We went to live with my aunt.

We suffered a lot for two reasons: we had no father to whom we belonged and we had no mother. We didn't belong to anyone. I stayed with my aunt,

his wife. We stayed there for a long time and I grew up. I worked in the fields. I did housework. I worked in the fields, fetched water from the river, gathered cashew nuts and made that *tontonto* (spirit drink). Because my aunt said, “Anyone who doesn’t gather cashew nuts won’t get any clothes”. So we had to gather cashew nuts, sell them and get money to buy clothes.

My uncle took our father’s oxen and sold them. We were left with nothing. Our older brother and sister, the children of my father’s first wife, were in another town. We continued to suffer, even though we had an older brother and sister. They weren’t interested in us. They didn’t care about us even when relatives went and told them to at least come and get Julia. My sister said, “I’m not going there because my mother died a long time ago. They’ll just have to put up with it”. So we just put up with it.

I grew up, and the evil spirit started to entice me, give me bad ideas because of my misery, because I saw that others had a home. I said, “Ah! If I had a home my life would probably change”. Do you see? That was the idea, but it was wrong; it wasn’t a good idea.

It started when I went to the shop to sell cashew nuts. Julieta’s father said. “Heyyyy little girl” in that manner of saying bad things. He worked in the shop and every time I went there it was the same kind of talk. Sometimes he gave me a scarf. Mmmm... why is this man giving me a scarf? What will I say to my aunt? (At home they taught me to say mother. We couldn’t say aunt, it was forbidden, nor uncle. We couldn’t call him uncle, we had to say father). I always wore that scarf.

One day he gave me a little blouse. But I took the scarf, and gave it to my aunt and I complained: “I’m afraid that when my uncle sees me with these clothes he’ll want to know where they came from. So will you. Where did I get it? Where did I get the money to buy these things?”

My aunt said, “All right. I can see that you’re starting to want to go out with a man. Don’t you know that you’re still a child?”

I said, “Oh! I don’t know if he wants to go out with me. Whenever I go there he says, “You’re my little woman, I’m going to marry you. I don’t know, aunt, is this his way of saying he’s my boyfriend?”

“Fine. You’re my daughter, you don’t know about men. That man likes you but he’ll be bad for you”.

It was always like that. Then the day came when I accepted, although not because I wanted to. It was only because of the suffering.

I reached the point where my heart said, “Ah! I might as well agree because the way I’m living now isn’t living. I’m suffering anyway”.

Then that man said, “I want to pay bride price so that you can be my wife. I already have one wife, you’ll be the second”.

For me none of that mattered. He could have had 20 women as far as I was concerned. It didn’t matter. I just had to get away and live in another house. I’m tired of this family of mine that’s always punishing me. So he became my lover, just so that my brother and I wouldn’t suffer any more; so we could have a decent life. Do you see? But, ahhh... pregnancy doesn’t take long, it doesn’t take pity on anyone. I slept with him the first day I went there. On the second day, or maybe it was the first, I got pregnant with Julieta.

My husband teaches me what to do. He tells me, “Do this, do that. I didn’t know anything. I’ve never done it before. I’m afraid and it hurts. I felt everything at the same time. But I thought “Oh! Being with a man is like this? Do all women go through this?” But in my heart I said, “If this is what it’s like I can’t come back, because one day I’ll be really hurt. My wraparound cloth was full of blood, my panties were full of blood. I’m not going to do that again”.

But Julieta was already stuck to my belly. I went home and stayed there. I went to the shop. The people in the neighbourhood started to talk, that man's daughter is pregnant". I had a friend who was also poor and she said, "Julia, you're pregnant. I heard someone saying that you're pregnant, is it true?"

"Maria, how can you say that I'm pregnant?"

"I heard about it. Someone told me you're pregnant."

"I don't know. Maybe I am pregnant. I sleep a lot, that's the first thing. I don't like eating *matapa*, I don't like eating *cacana*. When I eat it's as though I was afraid. When I eat, I vomit, and even when I have a whiff of *matapa*. I don't know why. It must be the pregnancy."

"Who got you pregnant?"

"So-and-so".

"That man?"

"Yes, that man". She was a close friend, my best friend.

"You'd better go and tell him you're pregnant".

"What are we going to say? If I'm not pregnant, what are we going to say?"

"Forget that. You've got all the signs so I'll go and ask my older sister because she got pregnant and had a child. So she can tell me how someone gets pregnant, how to know if you're pregnant".

Then I said, "No, she's not the one who is pregnant. I've heard a lot of people say that when you're pregnant you don't bleed any more. So I'm pregnant".

So I went to the shop, “Listen, I’m pregnant. You do understand that if my uncle discovers that I’m pregnant, I’ll have to come here?”

“OK. If you want to come then come. I’ve no problem with that. But maybe the child isn’t mine, because you sometimes played around with those “shop keepers” after you left here. You used to stop by there.....”

I said, “Listen, I’ve never been with any other man. When I slept with you and it made me bleed so much it was the first time. I haven’t had my period, and many people tell me that when there’s no blood the person must be pregnant. You aren’t going to change the rules of the game by saying that I play around with those shop keepers. They just say hi, and I also say hi. How can I go with one of those Indian shopkeepers when I’m black. So you can’t change the rules of the game. If my father asks me I’ll bring him here You’d better organize your life to include me”.

The baby started to grow. After two months I have a big belly and everyone at home knows that I’m pregnant, only my uncle doesn’t know. At 3 months, my uncle starts to see my belly, and one of my aunts says, “Looks as though Julia’s pregnant, is she?”

He said, “Call Julia today and I’ll let her have it. I’ll give her a good beating.”

When I arrived, my uncle said, “Julia, I see that you’re pregnant”.

I said “Yes I am and there’s no point trying to hide it because my belly is already stretching my blouse.”

“Who’s the father?”

“So and so”.

Then he said to my aunt, "Tomorrow morning take this person and get her to show you where she got pregnant".

We got up the next morning and went to see the man at work.

I said, "This is the man who made me pregnant".

"Do you know this girl?"

"Yes".

"Was it you who gave her things?"

"Yes".

"Then her father says you must go and talk to him yourself".

"OK, I'll go on Saturday."

She said "Saturday is too late, come tomorrow."

So he went and spoke with my uncle and my uncle decided, "You must pay bride price for her and then take your pregnant wife to live with you. I don't want to see her in my house again while she's pregnant. Julia, do you agree or not?"

I said, "I agree".

What could I say? If I refused I wouldn't have anywhere to live. So it was better to go and live with him as I was carrying his child. I went with that man and he arranged a rapid brideprice. It didn't take long and I hadn't been in his house five months/and by the time I was five months gone and he had already paid two and a half times the brideprice. In those days two and a half was a lot of money.

When I arrived I found that he already had several wives. There were three wives in his house, I was the fourth and I arrived already pregnant. There was a lot of confusion. There I was, pregnant, having to listen to insults by these *mamanas*, my rivals. They were always talking about me. My sister-in-law doesn't like me because my husband had never made a girl pregnant outside the house, never. The women said they would not accept me because this girl would take their tea, their sugar and would create a lot of confusion.

My life didn't change. It was there that I attended the school of life

They didn't like me; even my sister-in-law didn't like me. So you see my life didn't change; it stayed the same. That's how I ended up in the school of life. Life is the same as when I was a little girl and I was treated so badly in the home of my sister Luisa. When I arrived here I thought that I would have a rest but the turmoil just started all over again. I'd stepped into another load of muck. They said it wasn't his child. I had a hard time and couldn't do anything because I was pregnant, I just had to grin and bear it.

I just hung on until the baby was born. When she was born she looked just like her father and my sister-in-law started to like me. But that man had a disease that made his children die - but not with a machete, not by stabbing. It was part of his tradition. It was because of what happened when he was born.

There was an old lady who took a liking to me. She was always inviting me to go and eat in her house: "Come and eat with me. I've made a nice meal, you'll like it". Bean stew was my favourite and she always invited me over when she made it. She was a neighbour and used to sell things. She was always saying, "My dear, the man in that house is nothing, because he kills children. You're pregnant now but your baby is going to die."

“How will it die?” I asked. “How do you know it will die?”

She replied, “Throughout his entire life none of his children have reached walking age. The baby either dies either when it’s born or when it starts to crawl. And there’s no cure, or maybe there is a cure but he doesn’t want to say what it is. But don’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” I said. How can I? If I told him he would either beat me or do something else. I won’t tell anyone”.

Then I asked him if I could go and visit my father.

“What for?”

“I want to visit my family.”

He said, “You’ll give birth on the way there. You want to leave and go back there even though your father said I had to put up with you because you’re pregnant. You should wait a while. I’ll be back tomorrow.”

I said “All right, off you go.”

There were no children in that house. There were four women but they had no children. There was only the child of his nephew, but no child with any of his wives.

I told my friend about this. She was at my uncle’s house. I said “My friend, they say that no child of the man who made me pregnant has ever survived and that when the child is born it’ll die. I don’t know what to do.”

My friend replied “Go and I ask him about how he was born”.

“I can’t do that.” I replied. “He’ll say that I’m complaining. Why don’t you go to his shop and talk to him. Pretend you’re buying salt so you can talk to him”.

So my friend invented an excuse to go there. She told him that when his wife left hospital after having the baby instead of taking her home he should his take wife to her because she has a disease. My friend said she didn’t understand the problem completely and sometimes the disease couldn’t be cured. So she should take his wife straight to her house.

He replied, “All right. I’ll bring my wife and I’ll sleep there.”

After Julieta was born I was in hospital for a week, but I was afraid, “Will my baby die?” She was very thin, maybe because her father's illness had entered her body and made her like that. All the other babies were chubby but mine...

When the day came for me to leave hospital he said, “Your friend says that you shouldn’t go home. Let’s go to your uncle’s house.”

I said, “All right, let's go.”

I knew the secret but couldn’t say anything. After we arrived my friend prepared her medicine and cured him completely. She took out everything that was inside him and was killing his children. Because he was born feet first instead of head first, and they say that that is very dangerous.

He didn’t know that he was being cured. He thought it was me. But I didn’t have any problem; he was the one with the problem.

When Julieta started to crawl he became jealous. He was extremely jealous and started to listen to neighbours’ gossip and the tittle-tattle of his wives and he started to hit me.

He started hitting me

He started hitting me. Once when I returned home on a Saturday he wouldn't leave me in peace. He said I was a prostitute, that I was having sex with a man, that I was never at home, that my daughter was not his. "I know the child's father is so-and-so, you were lying when you said she was my child. How did she manage to survive when I know that when a child of mine is born it dies. You just wanted somewhere to live."

Do you want to know something? While I was in that house I worked hard. Those women didn't know how to work the land with an ox. They paid some men to do it. But I said to the young boy who was living there, "Fernando, I know how to hold a plough, I know how to till the land with an ox. If you agree we can do it instead of them spending their money; we'll plough with oxen. We have a plough here, we have everything; all we need is a person." He said, "OK mother".

But by then I was already walking on hot coals. My husband had started hitting me, and while I was working the land things seemed to get worse, because he didn't like me any more. He even said "I don't like you; I made a mistake. A woman like you is dirty, a woman who leaves her baby like that, who doesn't bathe."

You want to know something? When I wanted to bathe his first wife would cut off a tiny piece of soap. I am two families, and together with the young boy who was also suffering in that house we were three. Just one tiny piece of soap to wash nappies every day, to wash a wraparound cloth. How can a person bathe? During the rainy season you have to work in the fields from morning to night. When you leave the fields you have to go to the river to fetch water, prepare something to eat and cook it quickly so that you can return to the fields at four o'clock, carrying a child on your back. All this rested on my shoulders, but I had no dealings with men. There was no time and I always arrived home tired. But even so he hit me.

Then the day came when I was really beaten badly. At first he just used to slap me around but then when the day came for me to be really beaten. He went out into the bush to get a rope. It was some time since he'd hit me. I used to say "You're punishing me, beating me for something I haven't done." Sometimes I said, "If you don't like me you should send me back to my father's house because although my father is dead my uncle is still alive. Not all my family is dead. If you're punishing me because you're sure this baby is not yours, then no problem, my father will return your money. He'll repay everything you've spent. Although he may not have much money he has some, because my father's not dead."

He said "You're the only person in this house who does what she likes, everyone has seen you talking to Manuel, what do you talk about?"

I said "Manuel isn't my lover. He talks to me because he's a farmer and sometimes he asks how can I hold the plough and carry my baby at the same time. He told me about the "*xitique*" system, where people work as a group on each others' fields. Sometimes they called on our group but there was no man, just me and Fernando. Many people were amazed and asked "How can you, just a girl, do this and with a baby on your back?" But my husband doesn't like me doing collective work in the fields. But it was a good group.

Then one day he said, "You slept with Manuel yesterday."

"I slept with Manuel? Where?"

He replied, "Some people saw you leaving the bush and Manuel was also seen leaving on the other side. How come you were both in the same part of the bush?"

"But was this person following me?"

He said, "He is still talking about this."

He went out into the bush, got a rope and tied me up as if I were a thief. Then he started hitting me with a stick. While he was hitting me the other women were sitting there laughing. It was night-time so they were listening to the spectacle that was taking place in the hut where I slept. When I passed out he untied me and left me... I said to myself, "This beating is going too far. When I think I can have a rest I just get another beating. No, this really is too much." But I didn't say anything.

He stayed home on Saturday and Sunday and on Monday he went to work. I went home to my father's house and showed them where I'd been tied up and beaten. He had left the rope and stick behind and I took them to show to my father. I described how he'd accused me of going with men. But I said that I had a husband not a lover. I don't have anything. He doesn't treat me like a wife. He doesn't even buy soap and I have to stay dirty.

So for some time my uncle used to give me soap. He got some people to bring me soap and sugar. He said, "Hang on for a little while. Maybe he'll stop. And the child is still very small."

So I said, "All right, I'll put up with it for a little longer."

So I put up with it a little longer until the day came when I found out that the people who were spreading gossip were the women in the house, the other wives. They were spreading rumours so that I would be beaten. A young girl who was also our cousin told me, "Grandma, Auntie Maria is the one who's telling lies about you. Auntie Maria's the one spreading gossip." Auntie Maria was the first wife.

"I won't ask any questions", I promised.

When the day came for me to work with the plough in the fields she said, "Whore, tomorrow you must start weeding my field".

I replied, “This is my hand, my own hand, and the strength is mine. Since I’m a prostitute I won’t plough anyone else’s field. As of today everyone will till her field on her own. If I need to I’ll work on my own field. I won’t put a foot on anyone else’s field”.

She said, “It was my work that paid for those oxen.”

I said, “You can have your oxen, your plough. We have a plough and an ox at home, in my father’s house. I won’t spill any tears over that. If I want I can go home and get my parents’ plough, and bring one or two boys to help plough my field in just one or two days. You say bad things about me, but you need my work. I won’t do it”.

“You will do it, or you’ll see!”

But I replied, “I won’t see anything. With you I can’t see anything.”

She said, “You know me well”.

Then another wife said, “You’d better shut up. You know sister Maria will beat you.”

I said, “No woman can beat me. Against just one woman like her I’d be like two. She can’t do anything. If I keep quiet it’s not because I’m crazy, it’s because I don’t like arguing. Not because nothing is going on here, something is going on. I keep quiet because I don’t want a fight. She can say that she wants a fight but in the end we’ll see if she can beat me.”

She said: “You’ll see what I’ll do to you”.

So I said, “OK, we’ll see. I’m holding back. You do what you want.”

She went into her bedroom, tied on her wraparound cloth tight and came out wearing a shirt that looks as if she was going off to a war.”

My friend said, “You see, you provoked Maria so today you’ll get burnt.”

I replied, “I won’t get burnt. I don’t go into my bedroom to get ready. I’m ready as I am. I’m just waiting for her to come and face me.”

Then she appeared and started to grab hold of me wearing her little soldier’s shirt. She said “Today you’ll bow down before me.”

I replied, “I bowed down once with your husband, but it won’t happen again. Let’s see who’ll fall, you or me.

Then she hit me, like this, and I thought, “This woman is really playing with me”. We started to fight, or rather by that I mean I wouldn’t let her hit me. She was the one who got hit. I tore all her clothes and hit her so hard, releasing all the pent up tension of my many beatings, and she fell to the ground. I went and got a stick so I could pay her back for all the beatings I’d received while in that house. I was in hospital for three days but so was she.

I said, “When your husband comes tell him you were beaten. Tell him that if he ever hits me again, whether a little or a lot, I’ll hit you. Just so you know, I am not a member of your family. You’re here because of bride price, just like me. My father ate the bride price he got for me. Whatever I produce with my own efforts is mine. It was my father who taught me, not you or your husband. So no one will take advantage of my work. From now on I won’t work on anyone’s fields but my own.”

When my husband came home he said, “You shouldn’t fight your sister.”

I replied, “My sister is someone else, not Maria. This person is no sister of mine. I don’t know her.”

“You say that you won’t till other people’s land but you know that it was that woman who enabled me to buy the oxen.”

I replied, “The effort is mine, the oxen are yours. If you hit me Maria will pay. Just try it. You’ll have to stand guard over her. If you even go away for a few minutes she’ll end up in hospital. I’m telling you that I’m not going to work in anyone else’s fields, not even for a day. I didn’t buy the oxen belonging to this house but I do trade. You take everything that I earn. I work in the fields and then all my groundnuts, all my maize end up in Maria’s house. They say that each woman shouldn’t keep her own produce separate from the others but when they sell my produce they don’t give me the money. In this house I can’t bathe, can’t clean my teeth. My daughter doesn’t look pretty; she’s nothing because she has no clothes. But I go to the fields every day, working for her. I carry water, cook food, do everything while that woman just sits there. And then she says I’m a prostitute and keeps saying that I’ve got a lover.

I go to bed worn out but she never gets tired. She’s fat because she does hardly any work. I’m the one who works hard. It never used to bother me but now I’m always being beaten. You tied me up because you thought I slept with Manuel in the bush. But you yourself didn’t see me; it was Maria who told you. Everything you do to me is because of what Maria when in fact I didn’t do anything wrong. Now that I know it’s Maria’s fault, if you ever hit me again as soon as you leave Maria will get it. From this day on I won’t work in anyone else’s fields. My father has oxen and I’m going to tell him to bring them here to work in my field. Tomorrow or the day after my family will bring oxen to till my land. And I’ll even have a rest because I won’t be doing the work, my brothers will.”

“Ah, so you’re rich then?”

I said, “I’m not working because I’m rich, I’m working because I know, because my father taught me how”.

And then I went and told my uncle. The oxen came, worked in my field and then left. They finished the whole field in just three days.”

He said, “So now you’re going to live this kind of life?”

I said, “I’m going to live like this because at home I’m not poor. I’m only poor in this house. Here I have nothing, I just work for you.”

It was a hard path. Finally, one day I said “Enough is enough. I’ve had enough of that man. My uncle managed to arrange the two and a half bride price. I said, “Uncle, I’m tired of that man because he hits me and I have to work hard.”

My father said, “All right, it’s your decision. We have the two and a half money. I’ve been selling drinks and now I have two and a half. So if you decide you can’t take any more you can come home because the child is big now”.

“That’s just it. I don’t like that man any more because he’s killing me; he’s always hitting me.”

I ran away to my father’s house. “I won’t ever go back. If my daughter will only live because I’m there, then she won’t live because I’m not going back to that house.”

Then they talked, as required by custom, and decided that the two and a half should be repaid.

**I decided to leave, but I had to leave my daughter behind.
Julieta’s misery**

My daughter remained in her father’s house. But some time later she left and went to live with her aunt, his sister, in Beira. There was a lot of discussion and talk, and my daughter was treated badly. She was very young, only four years old.

When I saw how she was being treated I said, “Give me back my daughter, I’ll suffer with her.”

He said, “I won’t give you my daughter because you’re not a woman, you’re nothing. You’ll teach my daughter the bad ways of a whore.”

So I replied, “If you don’t want to give my daughter to me then she should go and stay with your sister. Otherwise the strike will continue.”

He said, “I don’t know about that. I’ll decide because I have the child.”

I said, “No. The child belongs to two people, to me just as much as to you. Our daughter has nothing to do with our rows. They only concern you and me.”

So I ended up without my daughter, with nothing. I told him to give her to my sister-in-law, his sister.

He said, “All right. I’ll send Julieta to Beira so you won’t bother me any more.”

I said, “That’s fine by me.”

So when she was four years old she went to live with her aunt in Beira. But her aunt didn’t look after her properly and treated her badly. She told me about it when she came back. She didn’t look as though she was nearly ten. That’s why she’s very quiet. Sometimes she’s good, sometimes she isn’t.

She, too, was beaten, just like me when I was in cousin Luisa’s house. My aunt was bitter because she had no children of her own. She has nothing so why should she take care of this child?

One day she said, “Mummy, she used to hit me.”

I asked, “You’re quiet, you don’t talk, you don’t say anything. You don’t like me but I’m your mother.”

She said, “Mummy, my aunt hit me.”

She was beaten and treated like a slave. When she was only five years old she had to pound maize, fetch water; she did the kind of things I should do. Her aunt said that she had to work in order to eat, and was always hitting her. One day, when she was beaten very badly, my daughter ran away and hid. She hid for several days until a relative, a niece, appeared.

When my niece saw Julieta she said “Let’s go and see so-and-so and get you treated”. Her body was covered in bruises because whenever she didn’t do what her aunt wanted she was beaten. The niece took her to town where they treated her wounds in hospital. My daughter was anaemic, swollen, didn’t have enough blood. It was all a big confusion, and all because of the beating.

So she told her father to go to Beira. The niece said, “Grandfather, you must come here because your sister is doing some very bad things.”

When he arrived her father saw that the child wasn’t well. She was ill, covered in scars and such a small child. And when you’re suffering you don’t look well, your face always looks as though you don’t like people.

He called his sister, “I’ve come here to resolve this problem. I’m going to take my daughter back with me. She’ll stay with me so you can’t punish her any more. If the owner of this child finds out I’ll be in big trouble. She’ll come from Maputo and she’ll want to know how her daughter got into this state.

So he picked Julieta up and took her home with him. And while she was in her father's house, when she was about six years old Julieta started to go to school.

She went to school but wasn't able to learn much because she was a bit confused in her head, agitated. She went to school but wasn't able to learn much. There was no final decision about her life. She went to school and studied, studied, studied, Sometimes she passed her exams, sometimes she failed, until she managed to work her way into standard four. But she was pushed, she wasn't taught.

Then he said, "Your daughter's back; she was in Beira."

"Really? If I have time I'll come and see my daughter."

By this time Julieta was about 7 or 8 years old and I hadn't seen my daughter for a very long time. Not because I didn't like her but because of the bitterness I still had in my heart. "What use was it to go and see the child? If she finds out that I'm her mother she'll suffer even more. It would better if she didn't know that I'm here, that I'm her mother. She's been told that her stepmother is her mother. For me it's enough that she's alive."

When I finally saw Julieta she was 11 years old. She was a woman about to start menstruation.

I said, "Are you my daughter?"

She looked at me and said, "Are you my mother?"

We looked at each other. That was all. She was needed in her family's house. She just came to visit me at my relatives' house.

When her stepmother returned with her she said, “She’s not your mother. If she were she wouldn’t have left your father. If she left him it’s because she isn’t your mother.”

She told her that I left my husband because I wanted to, that I abandoned my daughter because I wanted to. She didn’t know how much I was suffering.

So my daughter said, “All right.”

I returned home. She didn’t like me because of the things that were said about me.

But when she returned home my daughter was destined for misfortune. Once again she would suffer. She lived with her stepmother, who she believed to be her real mother. But it wasn’t true. She’s alive, living but suffering. I sent clothes, I sent everything. Because when I arrived in Maputo I didn’t sit with my arms crossed. I did anything that would earn money. Do you see? I saved that money and bought clothes for her. But that woman took the clothes and gave them to her own daughter. My daughter had no good clothes. And she worked so hard for all of them.

That’s why Julieta is a bit mixed up, because she suffered so much while she was growing up, because she never received any kind of affection. Without knowing her mummy, her daddy, my family and how to remain calm. She was poor, as if her mother were dead, as if her father were dead. It was as though she had no-one. All she had was a house to live in but that was all; she wasn’t living well.

She didn’t leave, she stayed there. Then the bad joke starts. When the war started she was taken by the bandits, and that was when the real tragedy started. The bandits took my daughter to their camp, where she really suffered. It’s a story that only she can tell. All I know is that she got pregnant and her father didn’t want any bandit’s child. I refused to let my

daughter gave up the child, she's my only good fortune. When Julinha was born she was very sick and her grandfather rejected her. My daughter and Julinha came to live with me.

I rebuilt my life somewhere else. I got another husband

When I came here I stayed in my brother's house and did little jobs to earn a bit of money. I had a boyfriend, or rather boyfriends, because I still didn't have a straight head on my shoulders. I still said yes to everything.

So I stayed in my brother's house with my lovers, but I always continued to work. It was there that I became a bit wild, unbalanced. It was there that I caught a disease. Today they would say I had AIDS because I was very ill with constant diarrhoea. I ended up just skin and bone, no flesh, no blood, no water. I was only alive because I had to be. I ended up in hospital. I knew all the hospitals in town. I was very ill. I went to the Central Hospital, the one near the museum, the hospital close to the police headquarters. I had relatives there so they let me in because of my diarrhoea. What really brought me down was the diarrhoea, nothing more. It hurt so much when it came out. It hurt. But I recovered and that was when I met Elidio.

The fact that I was ill didn't bother Elidio. He wanted me, he liked me. I said, "I can't take any more. My brother washes my clothes, he who does everything for me. Now I can't even work, I can't do anything because I can't even pick anything up. Why do you want a woman who is already in her coffin? Find yourself another woman, not me".

He said, "No, I know someone who can cure you".

In part Elídio did the right thing, he saved my life.

He said, "I know a lady from out of town who can heal at you. As you've been through all the hospitals in town and your medication isn't working

then on Saturday I'm going to take you to see this lady so she can cure you". So he brought the lady to me; he found the lady for me.

I got to know Elídio through my illness because this lady was a relative. When I was a little better Elidio, who was divorced and single, started to court me.

I said, "Elidio, I can't have any more children. I don't want a home because of that man who left me and you'll leave me too".

He said, "No, I won't".

But it was only to deceive me, because he had six children. I thought he only had three.

Then I said, "No. I don't want a man, I want to be alone. I want to remain single. I don't want a man taking care of my life".

He said, "I want a woman who will look after me".

I replied, "I'm afraid, because men hit women. You'll hit me and because I've been ill I'm weak and I won't be able to defend myself".

He said, "I've never hit a woman".

"So why did your wife leave you if you didn't beat her?"

He said, "That's nothing to do with you. It's none of your business".

"All right". So I remained in my brother's house. But he was always saying. "I want you".

I said we should end it, "I don't want a man to pay bride price for me again." I want you to marry me. I don't know if you're willing to marry me.

I want to get married because ever since I was a child I've dreamed of my wedding. That was my ideal. My father didn't marry, my mother didn't marry, so I must get married in a registry office and in church.

He said "All right then", because he was quite an important person in the church. His church didn't allow a man to stay with a woman without marrying her.

So I remained with Elidio. We became lovers and then one day I slipped and went to stay in his house. He went to my sister's house to present himself and pay 120 *contos*.

I went to Elidio's house and when I arrived I found all those small children. That was when I started to see that this man was playing with me. I spoke to him - because by then I could speak. "Elidio, tell me the truth. Whenever I leave work and arrive at your house I find these children. What's going on? You told me about three children but I can see six, and this little girl sleeps with you. What's going on? Tell me".

He said, "I have six children. This little girl is the sixth; because her mother left her here".

"You didn't say that she had to leave this child?"

He said, "No. She just said that she was going to leave the child here".

I never considered whether he liked me or not. You know, when you're still a young bride, it's like being in a teapot; it's like being shut inside a kettle. You can't see anything; it's as though you're in a communal grave. You believe everything people tell you, even when they're lying. You can't see. I couldn't see that he was lying, that he was hiring me to be his mate, to bring up his children. I couldn't see that. What I saw in front of me looked like love and that man was going to marry me. And many people say that when you marry a man, he no longer cheats on you.

I wanted to get married but I didn't know that he was deceiving me. Had I known I wouldn't have accepted. I could die without getting married, it didn't bother me. So the program went ahead. I started to see him, we organized the wedding, we got married, we lived together. I got married in church; I got married in a registry office.

We started to move forward together, side by side, watching each other. I saw that Elídio was very smart, that he didn't like me, he only wanted me to be his maid, to do what he wanted, to help him bring up his children. I stopped working and stayed there. I no longer had a job; I stayed at home doing *badjia*. Elídio worked in the Heart Institute; he might have retired by now. But at the same time he was very smart. He worked; he put sweets in my mouth saying, "Let's buy some land".

That was when I realized that this man wants the money I earned when I was working with those Swedes. Because when I used to work and receive wages he always took them into account.

He said, "I used my wages to buy food (food had been difficult for over a year), so I need your money to pay my debts. We must organize our lives so we can buy some land".

"All right".

I had no idea he was cheating me, that he was buying land for his children. He asked for all my wages and as he was my husband, what could I do?

I said, "all right. Let's buy the land, but first I must go and see it".

"All right".

I went to see the land, it was pretty and large. OK. I liked it.

We had to pay for the land. So I said, "All right, I'll get a job".

When I worked in the house of that Swedish man I earned a little in foreign currency: 20 dollars as well as 300 thousand *meticaís*. So when I changed the dollars I always got a lot of money. At that time it was a load of money. I used to buy groundnuts, rice, flour with that money. They paid for my weekly groceries. Then he started to see that I was earning more than him. My boss gave it to me for those children because he thought that they were all mine. When I bought clothes I bought enough for the whole lot of them. The Swedish man's children sent clothes for them all thinking that they were my children. As he didn't ask I couldn't say "They're not my children, I'm just living with their father".

So we bought the land and when we'd finished paying for it we built a house. We built a house with three bedrooms, a kitchen, a veranda and an outside bathroom.

But then the confusion started. I stopped working for the Swedish man, I stayed at home. The problem started when I was working in another house. I start to work, work; I came home went to work, home, work, home work. Elídio starts to say that I have a lover, that my daughter is stealing things. Because in the meantime Julieta had arrived with my grand daughter and Julinha was ill. She was very thin and had asthma. But he said the problem was that I had a lover, or because my daughter was a thief or because of Julinha's illness.

I couldn't understand it. What happens between a couple? I don't know. All I know is that that at night I couldn't sleep, we argued and argued, "I've discovered that you have a man in Costa del Sol. That's why you leave here so early".

"I leave early because I have a long way to go and I have to change buses".

There were other complaints. That my daughter was stealing, that she was eating a lot.

I said, “If my daughter’s eating a lot so are your children, because you are six plates and I only have one; my plate only serves two. Yours serves seven and counting your mother eight”.

“Get lost! That’s why you lost your other husband, because you’re wrong in the head”.

I said, “OK. I accept that I’m wrong in the head, but I won’t leave. Don’t think that just because you tell me to leave I will. Pack my bags and leave? No! I won’t. Just because you took me from my brother’s house you think that you can take me back and leave me there saying, “Here’s your sister – her daughter steals things, she has a lover, she doesn’t work”.

I can’t lie and say that Elídio hit me. He didn’t. But he could talk a lot, a lot. One night he would decide that you won’t get a wink of sleep. He talked until your head hurt. That man didn’t hit me, but how he could talk! So I stayed there. Why has this man changed? Because I bought the land? Because now he has a house? What’s going on? Is it true that my daughter steals things? How am I going to ask her? One day I’ll find a way to ask her, “Julieta, are you stealing things in this house?”

“Mother, I’ve never stolen anything but my little sister has”. She was referring to Elidio’s middle child.

“Little sister is stealing? Are you sure?”

“She has a key.”

So I said, “Really. Where does she keep the key?”

“I don’t know, but when you go out she opens the door to your room and takes sugar, other things, and sometimes money”.

“All right then. Don’t say anything. You must catch little sister with the key, do you understand? Then give it to me. I’ll talk to her father. Let’s keep watch on her key or, if you see her enter the room and leave the key on the outside, lock her in the room until her father comes home and catches her, do you understand?”

She said, “Yes”. A done deal. So Julieta kept watch on her little sister. God doesn’t tell lies, people do. The girl entered the room. Julieta watched her open the door, go inside and then close the door. She remained inside the room. Julieta did what I’d told her, “Lock the door, take out the key and leave your sister in the room. If you just take the key out and hide it that won’t work, because father will continue to blame us”.

After locking the door she took the key out and waited.

Father arrived home at half past three. When he opened the door he found little sister in the room with some plastic bags.....When I arrived home Julieta said, “Mother, little sister was caught in the room. I took the key and kept it”.

I said, “See Elidio? You’re always saying it’s my daughter; when things are damaged you blame my daughter”.

Then the rows started – rows and rows and rows, shouting that I’d bought the land, that I was still working, that I couldn’t take any more. Every day saying, “Get out of here”, every day saying, “Leave”. That was when I started attending the school for adults. What would I study? How would I live? I entered the school of life. I had to learn. How could I overcome all the obstacles that lay ahead? I bought the land and got kicked out. When I was in Julieta’s father’s house I got kicked out. Is it the same thing as being called a prostitute? Is it the same thing as saying that I’m not right in the head? How can it be?

I stayed. I thought about these things. While I was in his house I thought and thought, and thought about them. I'm not going to leave. If he doesn't do anything I'm not going to leave. I want to see the back of him. I'm no longer staying with him because I like him, I don't. I'm staying because I must. As he doesn't hit me I'm going to stand firm and fight to stay.

Then the day came. About ten o'clock in the morning he said, "Come on, let's make love".

"But it's morning and we're awake. We were together in this bed all night and you didn't say a word. And now you see that I'm a woman lying beside you.

He said, "That's it! You refuse to make love with me because you've got a man, that's why, because there's someone else. That's why you slept all night, because you knew you wouldn't be with him today".

"I don't have a lover. What would it be like if we started and then the children knocked at the door, what will we gain from that? Because now you say you've got to go to church. I want to put the kettle on, make sure that your shirt and trousers are all right, make breakfast and on top of all that I have to put up with you in bed. At this time I have to do everything for you to stay. I won't".

It ruined everything. I got out of bed, got dressed, put the kettle on, put water in the basin and said. "I'm going to have a bath".

I made breakfast and prepared his trousers and shirt, and he got dressed. He didn't say goodbye, he didn't say anything. His mouth was shut tight.

"Leave it".

I also got dressed and went to church. When I arrived neither of us acknowledged the other. We were in church. We left and as soon as arrived home, he said “Today’s the day you go back to your father’s house”.

“That’s fine, I’ll go”.

He said, “Get out!”

I said, “No! I won’t get out because you tell me to. If you give me some thing then I’ll go”.

“So what do you want? Do you want my underwear, a sock? What do you want? Do you want my body? What do you want, what, what?” And then he started to insult me.

“No, if you tell the truth. I’ll go”.

He started to write a letter, “Mr. so and so, receive your sister. Teach her what she should do with her husband when she’s in bed. As of today you should teach her what she should do in bed with a husband because she doesn’t know”.

When we were living together, I didn’t know how to do it, and now my brother’s going to teach me: when I’m in bed I should do it like this; my brother will tell me that I must open my legs etc. etc. My brother will tell me because I don’t know. I took the letter said, “OK. I’m off”.

I gathered my things together, all my clothes, and said to my daughter, “Let’s go. Pack the baby’s clothes and yours. We’re going to your grandfather’s house. He’ll organize a cart to fetch our suitcase. It looks as though the contract here has ended. We have to take our mattress”, because we had a small mattress. Someone gave it to us, I can’t remember who.

So we got our things together. I had some money because I'd just received my wages. I said, "Let's go".

We went out and left Elídio in his house. When I arrived at my brothers he wasn't there. I had a key because he sometimes told me to sweep the house as he had no wife. I used to sweep and tidy up. So we arrived, opened the door and went in. We made dinner and ate it. When my brother arrived home and saw us, he said, "What's going on?"

I said, "Eh! I don't know how to tell you, but he gave me a letter".

He said, "All right, give me the letter".

The letter only insulted him. So my brother said, "All right, you can stay here".

From that moment on I've disliked men. Men can say pretty things, say everything. I don't know whether it's true or not. But I won't ever believe any man again. I only believe in myself. I'll never trust a man again because men have caused me so much suffering. I've had to work like a horse because of men. Because of Mr. Elídio I had to work like a horse to buy land for him. The house belonged to both of us. It was ours. But when love started to fade....

When he started to get at me his family said, "She's a very good woman. Can't you see that that she bought land for you? How could you leave her? She's a good woman".

He came to the house to talk to my family. That's what usually happens when a woman gets angry and goes back home. The husband comes to talk things over.

I said, "No! I won't go back to Elidio's house".

“Why?”

“I won’t change my mind because my brother refuses to go to bed with me to teach me what he wrote about in the letter. If I go back, I won’t do what he thinks I should do. So, since my brother is still refusing to teach me I can’t go back. Only if he agrees to my brother teaching me what a husband and wife do in bed. If he doesn’t teach me there’s no point; Elídio must go back home. He’ll have to wait until my brother has time to teach me, otherwise I’ll never go back. Get yourself a wife. If you don’t want to that’s your business. As for me, I’m not going back”.

So I stayed in my brother’s house, suffering, not suffering, with my friends saying, “You should take him to court”.

But by now I was in the school of life, studying, so what could I say? Take him to court? A court case needs documents, divorce means paying a lawyer.....what should I do? I listened to what my friends were saying. Everyone was saying that I should take him to court in order to divide or sell the land and divide the money, or do something; he should give you some crockery or something. I couldn’t see any solution. I’d lived with Elídio for four years. The fifth year was nothing but trouble.

I really must go to the school of life

I decided not to go to court or to ask for a divorce. I had to see how I was going to live from now on. If he goes to court then I will, but if he doesn’t then I won’t. And that’s how it was. He thought that I would go to court but I didn’t. And I thought that he would go to court, but he didn’t. I was never called to explain why I gave up on him.

So I stayed at home. I stayed there thinking a lot about how I was going to live. How will I live? Then one of my friends said, “Julia. You shouldn’t be

spending all your time thinking. I'll find you a place you can rent but what you should really do is buy some land and build your own house".

"Build a house? Buy land? That requires a lot of money. I don't have that kind of money".

My program with my Elídio ran its course. I'm no longer in his house. I'm a single mother living in my brother's house. Then my sister-in-law starting giving me problems, saying bad things about me, saying bad things about my children. My brother got married. He has a wife now and she doesn't like me because I left my husband and brought expenses into her house. "You eat alone with your children and I'll do the same". Our life was like that.

So I really must go to the school of life and study how to live. Living like this is not living. Am I going to say that I'm in Maputo living like this? No! This is not life.

Then yet another problem arose. Julia got herself pregnant and it broke my heart. I had no more strength, nothing. My body was drained because of Julia. I was alive, able to walk, could see people, sometimes I knew them, sometimes I didn't. My wounded heart hurt so much. Where have I come from? Thinking about the past: where I've come from, where I suffered and suffered up to the point where I am now, and then yet another serious problem. What should I do? If my little grand daughter dies, with my daughter in that state - covered in sores, an operation - how will I live? This house isn't mine. It belongs to my brother who has a wife who talks a lot. Who will take Julieta in? Julieta doesn't know how to wash her own clothes, doesn't know how to do anything. She lies in bed from morning to night. She stays in bed. She can't eat anything heavy. I felt all this in the depths of my heart.

But I said to myself, "No! I won't give up".

So I started to borrow money from my boss. I wanted one million. I told him that there was a place for sale for 350. Then I did the calculations. If I borrow one million, I can take 350 of that and still have something left to buy a piece of land that someone arranged for me. A miner was selling seven roofing sheets. At that time each sheet was worth 30 *contos*, a lot of money. I bought them for 200 thousand *meticais*. I'd spent 500 and still had some 400 left over. What do I still need? I need to buy some cane and some poles. I said to the man, "Show me where I can buy cane, maybe poles maybe not, because I must buy them this week. I have to get out of that house because my sister-in-law is always complaining".

I used to leave my daughter with her but she wasn't treated properly. My sister-in-law left her dirty, didn't give her any soup, didn't give her anything. When I came home I would find her dirty. "Ma, I've had nothing to eat, I didn't take my medicine, I didn't have any tea".

I said, "I can't take any more. It's better to have my daughter staying with me, even if I have to leave her alone. I'll do everything. I'll keep her in bed, I'll wake up and go to work and leave her something to eat, rather than have her not take her medicine, not eat anything. She'll die of hunger".

This is too much pain, my heart is breaking.

I managed to build my cane house. I took a friend who was kind enough to carry my daughter, as she was sick and couldn't walk. We carried her in our arms and put her on the bus. I managed to take my things because she and her husband helped me. They left me in that house that didn't have a door yet. You just walked inside and slept. We all slept in the same bed - me, Julieta and Julinha. I asked a lady from Julieta's family to come and live with us to take care of Julieta and Julinha.

We lived in that room, more or less outside because if we didn't close the door we were sleeping outside.

During all those years when things were so bad, I still managed to do something. Now I have a good house that show my life to my other brothers and sisters who are suffering. I asked them not to give up, to keep on moving forward, and one day they would win. I fought, and now I have electricity and water. I have my family with me.

Now my relatives see that I'm someone. I even have a good name. I'm Julia, grandma Julia, because now I have something although I still continue to work. If any person, any woman is suffering because of men I want to tell her not to give up. She must fight and carry on fighting. But there are women who are miserable but can't leave that man. They stay and are beaten, treated badly just so they can say, "This is my husband".

I think that women should have the courage to say, "Hey, God's the father. Sometimes you can fight because those who fight have a heart, have the spirit to give it all up. If you drink, if you have a lot of men, give them up and go to the school of life, go and study. That's what you should do, just as I did".

Because of everything I've seen people can't believe that this house is my house. Seeing me sitting here now no-one can believe how much I suffered. They may think that I came by it easily. Someone else might think, "It's because she earns a good wage".

Because people often think that achieving something means earning a good wage. It doesn't. It means thinking what should I do with the little that I have, what should I do. Should I buy a saucepan for my house or a blanket? She may earn a good wage, but if she doesn't know how to organize her life she'll die miserable.

I had one other lover after Elidio, someone who had worked in the mines in South Africa. But as I now had a hard, resentful heart because of all those men who had caused me trouble, when he started I immediately thought, "Hum, this doesn't smell very good". I wasn't at all ashamed to say, "If you

think that this isn't working out, let's end it. Go back to where you came from. You know where the door is; I don't want any trouble with you. I want my own problems, not anyone else's." And he left.

That doesn't mean that when the miner left I was fine, but I'm getting there. I loved that one, I loved that one, and that one because sometimes it's necessary. A person can say I won't, I won't, but then when the time comes sometimes you waver and end up do something you swore you would never do again, like letting another man into your life. So the South African miner disappeared for good.

So if I ever have another lover now, with all this AIDS around, it'll be very different. I'll say "Hey, the radio and everyone are talking about AIDS, use a condom".

"If it's like that my friend, let's stop. I don't intend to catch that disease. I know all about it. Let's leave it because I don't want to die of AIDS and thinking you gave it to me. It would be better if I got AIDS in hospital because then the nurses would be to blame; it wouldn't be your fault. If you think you're unlikely to stay with me, with this woman, then get yourself another lover. I don't trust anyone".

At the moment I'm on my own. I'm on my own with my little grandchildren because men sometimes refuse to use that condom. Sometimes they don't agree. Some of the men I meet don't agree so I've decided in my heart to wait-that I want to rest at least three years.

That's what I think. But at the same time, I don't think because this house belongs to my grandchildren and to me. The land isn't mine alone it also belongs to my family, those who live with me, those who are written here on these documents. If I die, the house will remain with my grandchildren, my relatives, if I don't want to sell it. If I die I won't sell it because I'll be dead. But if I'm alive I might think about going back to where I was born if

none of my grandchildren need to live here. If one of them says granny don't sell the house because I want to live here, then I won't.

I'm not sleeping. You might see my head drooping but I'm definitely not asleep. All that misery at the hands of two men is enough. No-one will enter here with the idea that the house or the land is his or the bed is his. If he comes in here it's because it's in my interest, not the interest of the man who happens to be my husband at that moment. If this thing of being husband and wife comes to an end, then each one will pack their things and leave. If a man irritates me I'm not ashamed to send him away because what he does for a woman is precisely what I also do for him. So that he can feel that it hurts or it doesn't hurt, and I'll do the same.

If he comes in and says, "I want to buy a spoon, I want to buy.....", I'll say, "Look here, you didn't come here to buy things. If you have money to pay for your own house I don't want any problems with you, because this is my house, this is my land. You didn't come here to spend money on things that tomorrow will give me work/use things that gives me something to do/work tomorrow".

I don't want anyone giving me things to do. You can sleep here if you want, you can buy food because it will be eaten and then you'll go to the toilet. The food will end up in the toilet. But crockery, a blanket, a mat - I don't want any hassle tomorrow. Men are all the same, it's the same as when they say, "Women are no use". Men are also no use.

First, while we still get on with each other we're women but if we fall out that's when the rows start. "Ah, I bought this in your house and so on."

I say, "No. Your work is to sleep with me and nothing more. Wake up, leave some money to buy food, to buy clothes for you and me. You don't buy clothes for my family; I do that myself. You buy things for me because I'm your wife; they're not your wives. They are your grandchildren because you're here with me. So I don't want any trouble".

Do you want to know something? Men are crafty, men are. So if you say, "hii, hii it's because you're my husband", that's when he starts to take advantage of you. I can say in all honesty that I've not had a lover for the last three years, no one. I am living because I have to live. I'm amazed when a woman says that if you don't have a man you'll have problems. I've been without a lover for three years. If they examine me and say I've got AIDS it will be because they stuck a needle in me while I was hospital without knowing that they are giving me AIDS. But not because I slept with a man during the last three years. I haven't because I don't want them anymore. Men made my life miserable, so I dislike men, I don't like men.

As to my future, all I think about is seeing my grandchildren grow up and study well so they'll be able to take care of me when I'm a little old woman. This has always been my idea for my grandchildren and my only daughter; they're my family. Men? No, I've forgotten men. If I find a lover, OK, he'll be a lover for that moment, maybe for two days, maybe one. He'll be a lover just for that one day. But nothing in my house, no! I don't want another man until the day I die. I don't ever want to live with a man again.

Today I'm content. I'm content because I have a home. I know when it's morning and what I have to do. Now my heart no longer says, "When I stop working I think I'll go back to the place I was born."

Julieta says, "Go back there to do what when you're old?"

I said, "I'm going back because I don't want to stay here in town selling peanuts for small change in the street. I don't want to end up selling peanuts. Because when I no longer have a job, I'll still have my arms".

I'm going to build a house in the place where I was born. I have land; it was my father's. I'm going to occupy that land. He set it aside for me. My father never had those confused ideas about this is for women and this is for men. No! Everyone should have a piece of land. If I see that there is a home here

and everything's all right, then I'll build my little house, and work in the fields and live there.