

Mirembe Mary's Depression Story

I always wondered what went through the minds of people who contemplated death by suicide. In November 2018, I became part of that statistic. My name is Mirembe Mary and I am a Depression Survivor.

My emotions flare up as I write this because I am reminded of the time I almost gave up on life. At some point, it stopped making sense. The two most important people in my life had passed away so what was the point of my existence?

How do you wake up and want to live when the people you were biologically, psychologically and spiritually attached to are no more?

My mother passed away in January 2017 and took a piece of my heart with her. This particular kind of loss was new to me and I struggled heavily to cope. There are no words that I can use to explain the pain of losing a mother.

I stayed briefly with my maternal grandmother who played the soothing part well, an emotional pillar that gave me hope that I would get through this unfamiliar world of grief. However, that same grandmother also passed away in June 2018 and took a piece of my soul with her. While I was still adjusting to life without a mother, my grandmother's death felt like my already broken heart was shattered into more pieces.

The person who I was on and off dating by then; who I believed was my life partner masked up that bitter pain briefly. He was planning to come back to Uganda in January 2019 for holiday. The death of my mother and grandmother had brought us back together and plans for spending the rest of our lives together were back on. We had settled on having our quiet legal marriage; I was in charge of researching about the process and cost. Baby talks were underway too. We made our plans of going to a getaway trip to one of my dream destinations and he joked about how we would not leave that island until I conceived. We agreed on the name Samantha for our little girl.

As much as there was this glimmer of hope and temporary happiness, my mind, body and soul were still grieving the emotional emptiness left by the loss of my mother and grandmother. My current partner's communication skills left me in a desperate state, always craving for his attention, which he did not know how to give. He was in another country too and our time zones made it even harder. When I expressed my need for more interactive communication, he simply ghosted me. It was not new, he had done it multiple times before,

but why was he doing it at this particular time, when I badly craved for his emotional support?

November 2018 is the last time I heard from him. He did not pick my calls, stopped replying my emails and just like that I was so worthless for this individual to dump me with no explanation and at the worst point in my life.

Life after that exposed me to a version of my grieving self I did not know existed. The pain I felt in my heart turned physical. My chest would ache a great deal; most probably from the persistent crying. I would spend days in bed, crying until the tears became part of me. I lost interest in looking after myself, would not shower for days and would think, whom was I doing it for anyway?

It did not help that I was staying alone, in a house filled with my mother's memories. When I got the strength to ask God to take the pain away, nothing seemed to manifest. It is then that my mind started failing me and contemplating committing suicide. I had seen people in the movies slit their wrists, so that was the way I had chosen to leave this worthless life without purpose. I was mentally exhausted.

That life-changing day when I decided to indirectly say goodbye, I posted in the family WhatsApp group that I was getting off all social media platforms. Hence, the decision to also delete my WhatsApp account. I believe God awoke a maternal instinct in my aunty who happened to be in that group to privately reach out and ask if everything was okay. Since it was so out of character for me to distance myself like that.

That conversation introduced me to my therapist, Doctor Raymond, whose services she knew of. Because that time in my life I was indifferent with God spiritually, I believe that he created another avenue for my healing that was suitable for the wounds on my soul. The time I spent with my therapist sparked me re discovery; that ounce in me that still had a fighting chance of staying alive. All I needed was a different perspective.

My mental health journey started when I accepted that I had a problem bigger than me. I accepted to get help from someone who was clinically trained to deal with people like me, who had given up on life.

My first therapy session was mostly for my therapist to discover, explain where my problem was stemming from and why I was feeling the way I was feeling (broken and defeated). My first shock was finding out that I was suffering from

a mental illness. It had never ever crossed my mind that depression was a mental illness.

One of my therapist's scientific explanations to my problem was "low levels of serotonin in my brain". Serotonin is a chemical in the brain that is responsible for stabilizing our mood, feelings of wellbeing and happiness. When the levels are low like mine were, he said that "a person is prone to struggling with processing emotions like loss and grief the way I struggled to and my levels started to drop when I lost my mother."

After being diagnosed with mild depression, I was started on carefully designed therapy sessions and anti-depressants for nine months. The anti-depressants prescribed were to help bring back those serotonin low levels to healthy levels. Depression does not heal overnight hence the lengthy treatment frame.

My therapist explained that my medication was also because of my suicidal thoughts. Treatment processes vary however, while people like me needed to be medicated after assessment, some do not. You need to trust whichever treatment process is chosen for you so please do not be discouraged.

After my journey overcoming depression, I can qualify to say that I now understand what it feels like to have suicidal thoughts, how life can push you to the wall and if your mind is not mentally fit to process whatever is being thrown at it, it can fail. No one wakes up and just decides to end their life. A compilation of unpleasant events in life starts to wear the mind down until you lose the desire to live.

It breaks my heart whenever I see society call suicidal people or those who have actually gone through with the act, selfish. From someone who overcame the suicidal thoughts, I am a living testimony that some people need help to re-align their thought process with finding a reason to continue living regardless of the unpleasant experiences' life throws at them.

Today, I have dedicated my life to advocating for people dealing with mental health challenges. I tell my story so that they can relate and know that whatever is frustrating their mental health can be resolved with the right help.

My advice to someone out there struggling to cope with suicidal thoughts is to please seek help. Your mental health starts with someone teaching you how to cope with your triggers, boosting your mind with positivity not negativity. Seeing a glimmer of hope that there is more to life and that choosing your mental health from societal unrealistic expectations is self-love.

The help can be conventional or unconventional. While I personally failed to find the answers in church, I found them through scientific help. Talking about it with a neutral, non-judgmental person works too. Some days all you need is an outlet to voice whatever you are feeling and not feel judged. What worked for me might not work for you but please be open minded to other mental health services out there. It starts with you admitting that you have a problem and want or need help in solving the problem.

You requiring help to cope with a certain bad occurrence in your life or around you do not make you a failure or weak. On the contrary, this is a sign of strength for admitting that you have a problem bigger than you. Open minded enough to seek help from individuals or mental health services that are equipped to provide clarity and help you understand why some things might not be adding up in your life.

I pray that you reading about my testimony will ignite hope in you and choose to want to live a better life, free of sadness, confusion, judgment, rejection and un-fulfillment.

The world would not be the same without you.

You matter.

Letter to Myself.

Dear Mary, It's Me

All my years I went chasing after love from men but I never stopped to wonder whether you needed that same love.

I am sorry for breaking you to an extreme low but hey we beat depression 😊.

I guess the reason why now I am extremely guarded with our heart is the feeling of knowing how beyond painful it gets when it continuously gets shattered. From now on, we wait for the husband God created for us. Besides, we might know what we want but he knows what we need.

I come to you with a fighting mentality because our grandmother would be so proud of us for not giving up on life. You remember one-time while talking to God, I told him that if there was anyone, I would love to see welcome us at the gates of heaven, it would be her.

Mummy always used to tell us "Mwana wange tewelumyanga" (My daughter, never deprive yourself of anything good) so this is me going after that happiness that we both deserve, always have deserved.

I promise to take care of you physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. We just can't go back to that dark hole we barely crawled out of.

Ironical how my real name Mirembe means Peace and yet I struggled to make peace with all the challenges life threw at me. But worry not, I am currently working on something called developing a thick skin so that when more shit gets thrown at us in future, which I believe will because no life is smooth and perfect, we will be ready mentally.

Love, your forever loving self (ME)

