



My name is Sandi, I am 16 years old.

I used to live in a small town named Casazander, and this is what I remember.

My dad is a farmer and he leaves for the farm early in the morning everyday. My mom stays at home to take care of me and my sister. I am the oldest child in the family.

Playing with my sister was the happiest thing and I love seeing her smile and hearing her giggle. In the summer time, we played hide and seek and jump rope around our house that is made out of mud and straws. My mom used to sit by the front door, doing her house works while watching us playing.

I enjoy going to school, especially maths, it is my favorite subject. It was my dream to become a good math teacher when I grow up. w





I was told to quit school one day.

My parents married me off to a Nigerian businessman because they needed the money to support the family.

I told my dad I don't want to get married but he told me if I didn't, I would no longer be their daughter and I would have to leave the home.

I was in 6th grade when I got married.

I later knew the bride price my husband paid was three cows.





I didn't meet my husband until the day of wedding. I moved to his home in another town.

I didn't know what a wife should do and I didn't know how to get along with someone who is so much older than myself.

He forced himself upon me the night of our wedding. Three months after the wedding, I missed my period.

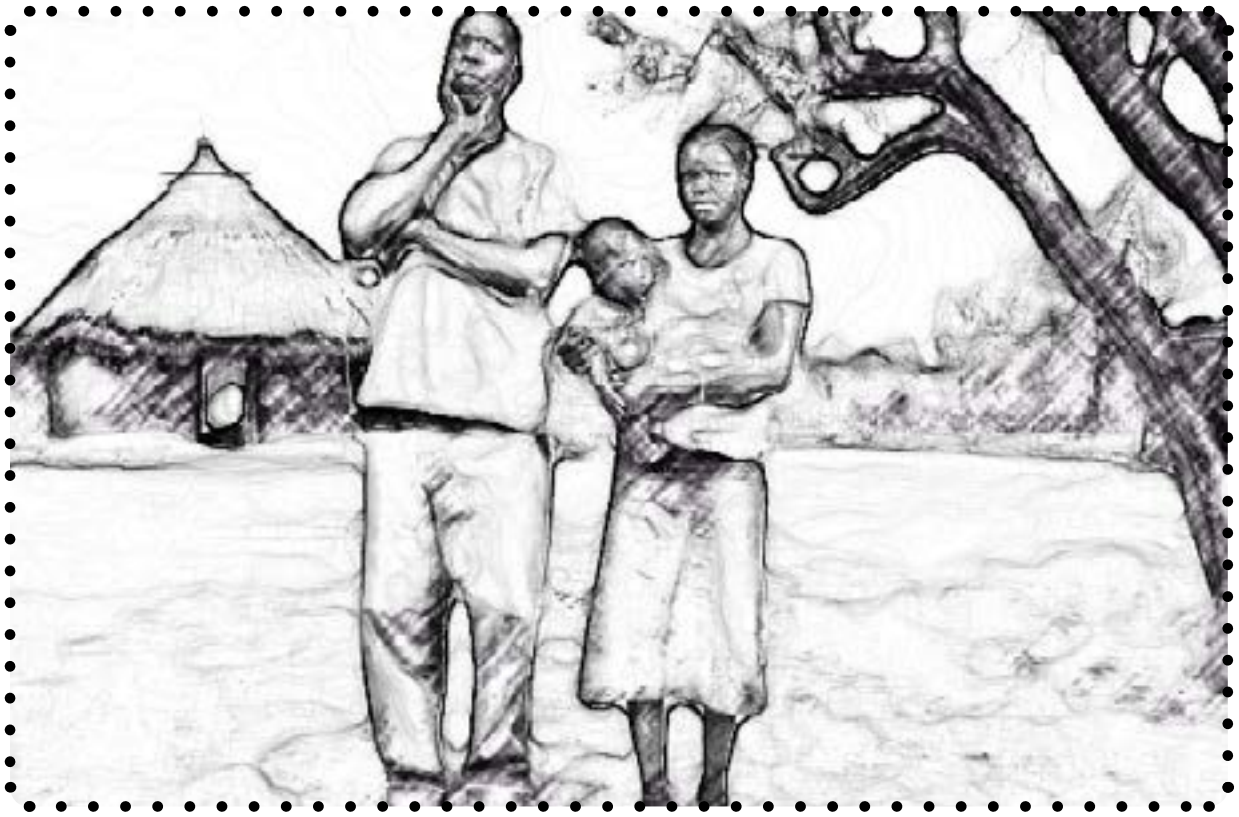
I knew nothing about being pregnant except I feel sick all the time.

I knew nothing about being a mom except I was a child myself.

I almost died when I gave birth, my body was not ready for delivering the baby.

I felt helpless and I was scared.





When my husband is sober, he is nice and he helps taking care of children. I thought we love each other. But after one year we got married, things started to change.

One day he came home from drinking and told me to leave -- but I didn't want to leave. So he grabbed my feet and started dragging me out of the house.

I didn't know what I did to make him so angry.

I didn't leave our home because I have always told that once you are married, you mustn't abandon your marriage. But the longer I stayed, the more he beat me.

Sometimes I went back to my parents' and also complained to his parents, and he would promise to stop beating me.

I returned to our home but three days later he would start beating me again.





Two days after I gave birth to our second child, he came home and started beating me across the breasts with a piece of wood.

He carried on beating me and shouted he would kill me, and bury me at night.

I told my neighbor what happened and she told me about a local shelter for women. The next time he started beating me again, I ran away to the shelter.

A month later, my husband was summoned to a meeting and he came. He made a written promise to stop beating me.

We eventually returned to our home.





I stayed in my marriage because of my children.

I said to him, "We now have 2 children, how long will you keep up these arguments?" He said, if I go - I will have to leave my children behind.

I didn't know what to do.

One day, I went to sleep, and he went after me.

He blew out the candle in the house but then came into the room with a box of matches. He lit a match and threw it at me.

He wanted to burn me.





The fire caught my clothes but it died out. He lit another and threw it at my neck but it also died out. As he was lighting a third match my youngest child got up and asked for water. As I got up to get the water, he took a cloth and started strangling me with it.

His attempts to beat, burn and strangle me were the last straw for me.

I went and stayed in the local shelter and searched for a refuge for myself and children. My husband wouldn't leave me in peace. He came searching for me at the shelter and forced me to go home with him.

The police were called and my husband was arrested.





Even though I live in the shelter now, I still worry a lot.

I worry that my husband is now in jail and my children, who now live in my husband's home and I don't know who is taking care of them -- the oldest girl is 4, and the youngest is only 1.

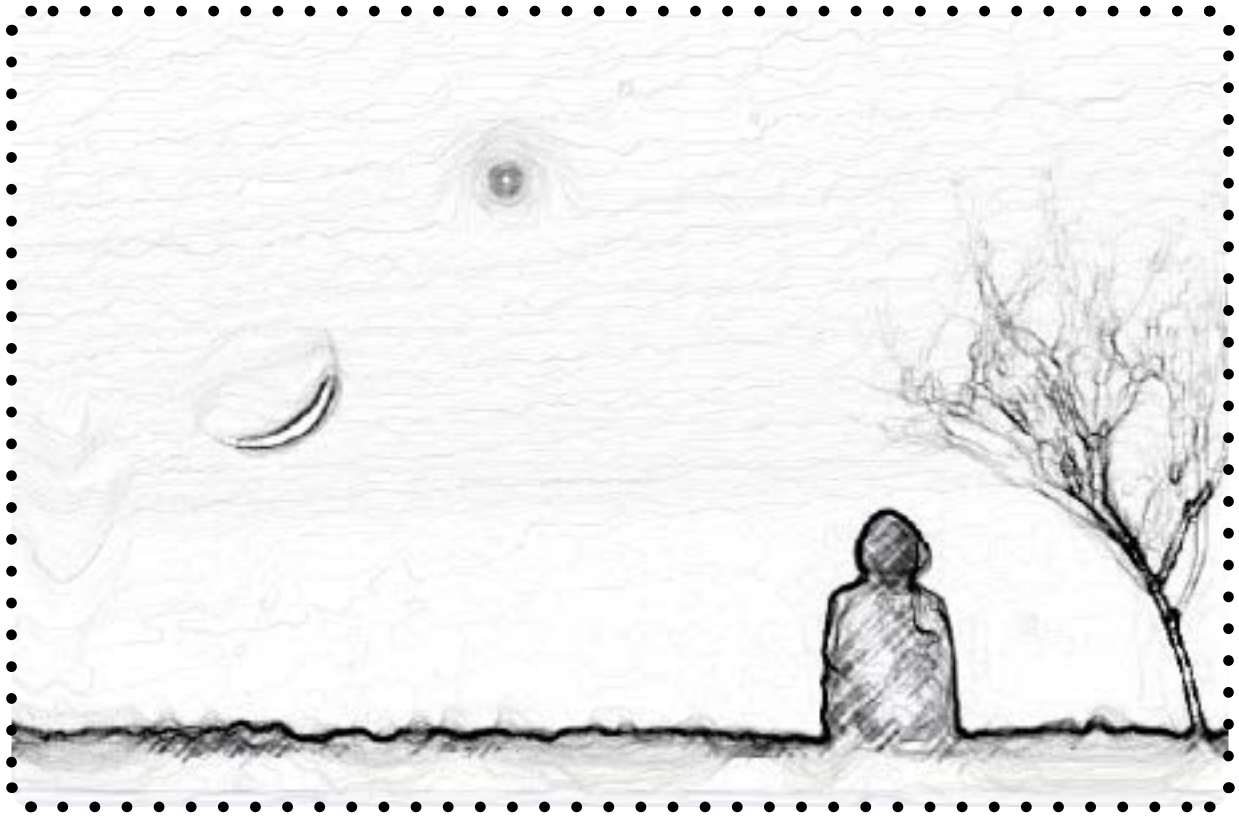
I worry about money, my husband, my chores, and most of all, my children.

I fear that someday my own daughter will be married off early.

As a mother, I hope I can have influence on my daughter's life. I want to tell everyone that no young girl deserves to go through what I experienced.







If I had the chance to get older, if I had the chance to finish school, I imagine that I am a math teacher now and I am good enough to help my parents.

I wonder, if my dad knew what happened to me, would he still marry me off when I was only 12?

More fathers should know the consequences of child brides so they do not marry off their daughters early.

I wish we don't have to be poor anymore.

I miss my family, I miss my sister, I miss school.

I miss my pen and my book.

How I wish I can go back to school.

