

The HFM founder's story

People have asked me what motivated me to start Hope for Mtshabezi organization. Out of grief of losing loved ones too often, I decided none of them would die in vain.

In June of 1996 I lost my only sister Sibonakele and went through incredible anger and sadness at a fallen health care system in Zimbabwe. Soon after my sister's death I would talk over the phone with my brother's wife while she nursed Ayanda, her 6 year old son who was very ill. There were many moments I would go to sleep and have bad dreams after hearing my nephew shriek in severe pain. It was heart wrenching for me a thousand of miles away and I could not imagine what my sister in law was going through. Ayanda died at the age of 7.

The memories of my nephew haunted me so much that one night I had a nightmare that my then 15 year old daughter Sno was dying. In my dream I was visiting my home village in Zimbabwe and suddenly my daughter was struck by an illness that needed immediate medical attention. I knew if I did not do anything about it she would be dead in a matter of hours. I watched her as her eyes rolled back in her head about to take her last breath. I had the money and I had a car but the nearest hospital that could take care of her lacked the proper equipment and staffing. I woke up sweaty and shivering. It suddenly occurred to me that my dream was a reality for most parents in my village. It jolted me to do something about their fate.

At the time I was working in one of the most prestigious hospitals in San Diego. The inequalities in the health care system between Zimbabwe and the USA blew my mind. It was then that I decided that I should use my knowledge and expertise to help. I was determined to do something. So I looked at the hospital closest to my village; Mtshabezi Mission Hospital. I talked to some trusted friends and family, and in April 2005 Hope for Mtshabezi was born to serve the community of Mtshabezi.

I have to admit that I may have been a bit too late to save my own family. Soon after my sister and my nephew died, I lost my mother, then my brother. In addition to those four, I have lost many cousins and friends. I buried my last nuclear family member in 2008, my dad. All these people died of varying health problems. For example, my mother was misdiagnosed with esophageal reflux disease because she could not swallow and kept throwing up when in fact she had a tumor that was pressing on her esophagus. They were not able to diagnose that until three days before her death.

It has been a long painful road for me, I am most thankful that my husband and my children are healthy. I am also encouraged when I visit Mtshabezi hospital and see the improvements in the level of health care provided. I also know that my family did not die in vain when I see hundreds of people lined up to receive treatment in the community health outreaches that we run every six months.

Contrary to popular belief, not everyone in Zimbabwe dies of HIV/AIDS. We have treated people with fumigating breast cancers who need pain medication because it is too late for them to receive chemotherapy. We see a lot of patients with high blood pressure and diabetes. I am convinced we might have averted a stroke or two by dispensing high blood pressure medications.

I have been particularly touched by the number of Zimbabwean volunteers; doctors, nurses, pharmacists, pastors and everyday people who partner with us and take care of the neediest in our society. I am also very thankful for the financial gifts we receive from those that cannot be there in person. In his book the "Cathedral Within" Bill Shore said "I refuse to accept the world the way it is." May be it is time for all of us to refuse to watch people suffer while we enjoy life in our comfort zones. In Matthew 25: 40, Jesus also said "For whatever you have done for the least one of these brothers of mine you have done for me."

Thank you for coming along with us on this incredibly important and exciting journey.

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