

**CLASS OF 1984's NDESHI HANGULA'S STORY IN HER OWN WORDS!**

**(Compiled by SakerPride)**

**AUGUST 18<sup>th</sup> 2019 FACEBOOK POST:**


Upon arrival in Cameroon in late 1979, from the group of about twenty Namibians, I was the only the one who went to Saker Baptist College (SBC). I joined Saker Baptist College a month or so after school had already started, hence there was no orientation for me. I remember arriving at Saker in the morning hours, whilst everyone was in class. We went right up to the principal's office with Rev. Nyansako Ni-Nku, who was the UNHCR program coordinator. I had no clue of whatever was discussed in the principal's office, as I had no understanding of the English language (coming from Namibia where Afrikaans was the official language). After the formalities at the Principal's office, I was taken to my new class form 1B, by Ms Wilma Binder the vice principal, who introduced me to the teacher and the class and I was shown to my desk.

You wouldn't want to know what was going through my head at that moment. I was confused, frightened, and anxious and mum throughout the English period. My big brown eyes were glazed throughout that period and my classmates kept on staring at this stranger in their midst, dressed in civilian clothes as everyone was wearing a blue uniform. Only God knows how I made it through that first day of school. I sat throughout all the lessons without having a clue of what was being taught. At the end of the school day, everybody rushed out of class and I was left sitting as I had no idea what was happening. One of my classmates came up to me and tried to explain that we had to go down to the dining hall for lunch but I had no idea of what she was talking about. Just then as I was about to following her, another girl came to my rescue. She introduced herself to me in Oshiwambo and at that moment, I realized I was not the only Namibian at Saker. I found out later that that we were about fifteen, majority of them in form two and three.

To sum up my first few days at Saker were not easy, at that young tender age I found myself in an environment with so much contrast from where I was coming from. As much as I was excited, I was no longer in a refugee camp, where tents had become our roof for God knows how long. I found myself in a country where I had no clue where it was, with so much diversity in terms of culture, language, history, landscape and diet. Before we left for Cameroon, we were briefed that our stay in Cameroon was for five years which was the duration of our secondary education and of course no vacation to Angola. I therefore resolved myself to make Saker Baptist College my home, even though I had no clue how long five years was going to be without seeing my mother and little sisters that I left behind in the SWAPO camps in Angola.

**EXTRACT FROM HER KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE 2009 ExSSA-USA CONVENTION IN WASHINGTON, DC**

My story started with my birth in the country of Namibia. Mine was a normal upbringing as best as it could be, considering that I was born of a woman, who had made politics her life. I grew up witnessing



the daily harassment that she, other members of my immediate family and members of my neighbourhood endured, as a commitment to paving the way for Namibia's independence.

It was in 1979 when I found myself on a journey to Angola. A decision I was never part of and had no idea where I was heading to until I found myself in the bush, crossing the borders of Namibia into Angola, together with members of my family and other companions. My mother had decided that, as a result of the daily oppression of the colonial apartheid South African regime, that enough was enough, and it was time to seek for refuge in Angola.

I guess she just did not see any future for herself and her children (my two younger sisters and I) and she decided to take that long, long journey into exile, to join the rest of her comrades under the auspices of the South West Africa People's Organization – (SWAPO of Namibia), the armed liberation movement.


In Angola, one of my immediate younger sisters and I were separated from our mother, to join the rest of the youth in Kwanza Zul, at the education camp where our peers were already in school. My mother and my youngest sister went to another camp where elderly people and younger children were hosted. My mother was a nurse by profession, so she took up the duty of caring for the sick in that particular camp.

The education camp was a big camp that accommodated children of primary school education and the number was just growing on a monthly basis as many more young Namibians were leaving Namibia into Angola. Once you left Namibia into Angola there was no way of turning back or going back to Namibia, as we became "terrorists" according to the South African regime and you could be jailed or killed depending on the circumstance if you had gone back to Namibia.

At the time there were very few qualified teachers to cater for the thousands of exiled children in the camps. Like any other refugee situation, international organizations were in solidarity with liberation movements from Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa just to mention a few. The United Nations, through its agency the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) played quite an important role in supporting our cause.

Like many other Namibian students before us, it was through this support that about twenty of us were sent off to Cameroon for secondary education at that particular time in 1979. The UNHCR facilitated this role since the exodus of Namibian refugees started pouring in the camps of SWAPO in Angola and Zambia, from 1975 till at the dawn of Namibia's independence in 1989. Through the UNHCR programme, Namibian students not only studied in Cameroon, but were in secondary schools, higher institutions and technical colleges all over West Africa, in nations such as Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and the Gambia, to name just a few and the world over.

From my group of about twenty that left for Cameroon in 1979, I was the only one that went to Saker. The rest went to other secondary schools in Buea, Molyko and Kumba. On arrival at Saker, I realized there was a group of Namibians students studying there, hence I felt very relieved that I was not alone, even though I had never met them before.



Some of you here might recall the Namibian sisters some before me and those I found there, such as: Eunice Mayumbelo, Hilda Lukileni, Libertine Kautwima, Rebecca Munyandi, Ndilimeke Shikongo, Penny Moses, Maria Hiyalwa and Sarafina Kapalondwa. Unfortunately, some of our sisters have journey on and gone beyond us, such as ...the late Ndahafa Mavulu, Esther Mathe, Hileni Nahole, Helena Shimbudhi, Emily Hangula, Teresia Nailenge, Milka Kalomoh, Paulina Shimbudhi, Eivy Magdalena Kambangula! May their souls rest in peace!!!

My going to Cameroon, let alone Saker was not easy for me. At that tender young age – I was alone in the world and in a country with so much diversity in terms of culture, language, history, landscape and diet -- everything was new to me. One of the challenges I encountered when I arrived in Cameroon was the language barrier. I came from a country whose medium of instruction at the time was Afrikaans and was suddenly expected to communicate in English. Oh, what a challenge it was!!!!

The first few weeks were tough for me. Some of you may recall that we had a group of Namibian students who ‘rebelled’ against the rules and regulations of the school at the time and who were eventually expelled from Saker and were returned to the camps in Angola. I was caught in the middle at times, was scared and confused as I did not know whether to join the group or not. It was my first year at Saker when this happened and for me I really did not understand what triggered them to do what they did. Although at times I wished I could join them because I knew that was a passport to let me go and be reunited with my loved ones.

Yet, on the other hand I knew returning to Angola would have given my mother the passport to “kill me with her bare hands.” Hence I had no option but to adapt to the situation at Saker.

It was tough and at times I cried alone, due to loneliness and longing for my mom and siblings. It was made clear to us from the beginning before we boarded the plane to Cameroon that we were to stay for five year secondary education without any chance of a holiday to Angola and I never thought I would endure that.

I arrived at Saker late in 1979 around October/November, and the academic year had already started in September. I needed a sense of belonging and be part of my class. I was shy to mingle with the girls in my class because I really could not communicate well in English. There were those classmates who laughed at my broken English and they enjoyed my accent. But that did not deter me because I thought to myself I needed to be part of them.

I decided to come up with a strategy, knowing that they have never been in a war situation or lived in camps in the middle of nowhere. I started telling them about my experience of living in the bush. The joy came when they started getting interested and more of them wanted to know more about life in



refugee camps. It was hard for many of them to imagine and understand what life was like in a refugee camp.


The more they came to listen the more I started making up stories and I felt I was on top of the world at the time. I told them how I was “trained as a soldier and killed many enemy soldiers with the popular Russian riffle, AK47. I told them I killed lions and elephants and went for night and days without food as a soldier”. Sometimes I would make up stories just to entertain them especially, and they believed me. I enjoyed seeing them perplexed and deep down I would laugh to it. Through that, I became popular and made many friends in my class. Most weekdays after siesta or Saturday afternoon, instead of going up to class to read, my classmates will surround me to hear my stories on the lawn behind the circle by the flag poles near the admin block. I even became so mischievous and just loved to entertain my classmates, but to them, it was real and that is how I found my sense of belonging.

At times during lunch in the dining hall, Namibian girls were called upon by some of the prefects to entertain the rest of the students with Namibian songs and dances, and I would be the first to jump on the stage, even though I had not finished my zeze, or corn chaff or beans and ripe plantain or whatever meal it was for the day. I taught the choir and classmates songs in my native language and entertaining-dancing songs which they really enjoyed and I am surprised majority of the girls still remember these songs. I feel so overwhelmingly fulfilled to the extent that I am proud of the fact that I have left a legacy in that field, as my little humble contribution during my five year stay at Saker.

My love for singing even paved way for me to become one of the assistants to the music prefect in my third year and in my final year at Saker, I became the music prefect (first ever Namibian prefect).

During the war while at home in Namibia even though the political and economic situation rough and tough for native Namibians, my parents tried so hard to take good care of us from the time we were little. They taught us the values of life such as to obey and fear the Almighty, to respect our elders and people around us. We went to Sunday school and sang in the Sunday school choir. I was also part of our church youth choir. So singing at Saker was not a new phenomenon for me. I feel blessed for having been sent to Saker amongst all the secondary schools in the South West Province, because Saker just continued to teach and instill the values from home and nurtured me into a God- fearing teenager.

As tradition still has it at Saker, I was adopted by sister Batenyo Makia and joined the long line of her petites such as Ozee, Anita, Irmhild and Nanjui. I remember my first Visiting Sunday at Saker when Batenyo’s parents came to visit her, she was just so proud to show me off to Mr. and Mrs. Makia. Mrs. Makia stared into my big brown eyes for a while and right away made the decision to adopt me. She turned to her husband and said, “Papa, I like this one, we go take this pikin, holiday come, she go come Kumba”. Their intentions were made known to our then principal late Mr. Tayui, and I officially became



part of the Makia clan and since then every holiday was spent with them till I departed Cameroon back to the camps in Angola.

Living with the Makia family in Kumba was such a thrill for me. I literally became part of the Makia household. They nurtured me so well and they continue to instill the values of life in me and treated me like a queen and because of my name Elizabeth, my mom Mrs. Makia called me Queen all the time and my father Mr. Makia called me "Eli-koko".


In 1982, I was privileged during the long holiday in my third year while in Kumba, to receive a surprise visit from my biological mother. She was coming from Nigeria where she had just attended a World Health Organization seminar in Lagos. She stayed with us at the Makia residence in Kumba and we even drove to Limbe for mom to see Saker. My mother met Baba and my sister Batenyo who was on campus during that holiday preparing for GCE, Class of 82. At that time, I truly felt honored and privileged for my biological mother to have visited and to meet the Makia family and our then principal. None of my Namibian colleagues in Cameroon or even those who were studying in the rest of the other West African countries ever had that opportunity of being visited by either one of their parents. For me, it was a true blessing and I thank God Almighty for according me that opportunity. In a way it was a big relief and an encouragement for me to stay on until my mission was accomplished in Cameroon.

After Cameroon, in 1986, I was fortunate to receive a scholarship that took me to Zimbabwe where I did a two year National Diploma in Mass Communication at the Harare Polytechnic. When I went back to the camps in 1984, communication through letters was very difficult because sometimes letters never reached their final destinations. The best thing at the time was just to make sure that I held on to the Makia P. O. Box 35, Kumba, Cameroon.

Moving to Zimbabwe, communication was more smooth and easy. I could now communicate with my family again and I want to acknowledge my brother Tabi Makia who is here tonight for being the link and who always tried to search for me when I became lax in communicating.

Upon completion of my diploma in Zimbabwe in 1988, I got another scholarship to study communications in Vancouver, Canada. While in Canada, the link between me and the Makias was even easier for I could now visit them here in America. Thank you, my big sister Banyo, my big brother Asek and Mrs. Makia, for taking care of my first born whom you named Spooky – while I was finalizing my studies in Canada.

Even though I went back to the camps after Cameroon, and from there ventured to other parts of our wonderful world – a strong foundation was laid for me by Saker Baptist College and the Makia family. It



has upheld me and made me what I am today. The norms and values that were instilled in me guided me through the difficult journeys that I had to undertake by myself and shielded me from all sorts of distractions that awaited me. Some of my comrades and peers in exile, be it in camps or in the countries where they found themselves, went astray and their lives were destroyed. I thank God for taking care of me and my family through this rough and sometimes difficult life of a refugee. In 1994 I went back home to an independent Namibia, to join the rest of the comrades and contribute positively to a new Namibia.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge our late principal Mr. Tayui, whom we fondly called Baba, for admitting Namibians to Saker. Thank you, Ms Binder, for keeping us straight on our toes and most importantly, for not treating us differently from the rest of the students. Also, Bobo, Mr. Ntonifor, Mrs. Ewanga, Ms King, and the rest of the staff at Saker during my time, for the sacrifice and perseverance. Not to forget Ms Kern and Ms Fokam for teaching us those beautiful songs that turned us into angelic voices from up high. Those teachings and values made us, Saker girls, stand out and it distinguished us from the rest.

Thank you, Cameroon, for being so generous in allowing us then refugee students, to study and further our education in your various institutions. Thank you to the Cameroonian families that were willing to put forth and share whatever little they had with us. I am forever thankful for the opportunity that has significantly contributed to the woman that I am today. Today, among the many hats I wear, I am a wife to my sweetheart of fourteen years in marriage, Popyeni Shikwambi and blessed with four handsome boys, Pandeni, Pameni, Penda and Pandu.

Last but not the least, this is a great testimony for me and I thank the organizers for having given me the opportunity to present my story. I will dearly hold on to the memory and share it back home with my family, fellow Namibian colleagues that studied in Cameroon and others alike. Know that if you ever find yourself in the southern part of our continent – our home is your home!!!!!!

I love you and God bless you all.