

MY STORY

My name is Susanna Tjipanga, and I am a Namibian National currently living in the United Kingdom with my three children. My life is one marked by tragedy, resilience, and survival. I lost both of my parents when I was only three years old, which changed the course of my life completely. Despite the pain and challenges I have faced- including forced marriage, domestic abuse, and emotional trauma. I have learned the importance of strength, perseverance, and hope. This story shares my journey from childhood to where I am today.

I was born in Namibia, where my early life was shaped by loss. My parents passed away when I was very young due to illness. I grew up with my brother Isack, who was slightly older and remembered our parents better than I did. He later told me that our parents had struggled with alcohol dependency, which contributed to their poor health and early deaths. After their passing, Isack and I were adopted by the family our parents had worked for. At first, life with our adoptive parents seemed stable. They owned many cattle and were financially comfortable. However, over time, their situation changed. They sold most of their cattle to fund their daughter's education overseas, which left them struggling financially. In their efforts to regain wealth and status, they began considering traditional practices such as arranged marriages, which are common in Herero culture. In our community, it was not unusual for parents to arrange marriages, often at a young age and without their consent. I had seen this happen to other girls in my extended family, including my adoptive father's niece, who was married off while still very young. Unfortunately, I did not realise at that time that I would face the same fate.

In 2007, when I was 31 years old, my adoptive parents arranged for me to marry a man named Epsen, who was a relative of theirs living in a nearby village about 17 kilometres away. They did not tell me the truth about their plans. Instead, they deceived me by saying that I would be working for him as a cleaner. When I arrived at his home, I found several elders speaking quietly among themselves. Epsen was there but said very little. The elders told him that I would be staying there with him, and my adoptive parents left without any explanation. That was the beginning of one of the most painful periods of my life. I was forced into the marriage against my will and experienced domestic violence, sexual abuse, and emotional suffering. I felt completely trapped and powerless. The trauma of that experience left deep emotional scars, eventually, I was diagnosed with anxiety as a result of the abuse and the years of fear I endured.

Eventually I made a brave decision to escape. Leaving that life behind was not easy, but it was necessary for my survival. Overtime, I managed to build a new life for myself and my children. My brother Isack cared for my children in Namibia before we were reunited in the United Kingdom. Living here has allowed me to begin the healing process and to provide a safer, more stable future for my family.