

a troubled mind

A young Motswana bares his heart, mind and soul in his quest to find his true self. Thato Moruti's story tells how changing our lives begins with transforming our thoughts. He writes with a conviction that we are all capable of finding ourselves, and believes we can choose to be imprisoned in our minds or break free to become better persons.

thato moruti

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**A
TROUBLED
MIND**

thato moruti

FOREWORD

It takes discipline to bring an idea from conceptualisation to completion. Many great ideas die an early death because there are no champions to push and prod the concept into birth. Thato is a young man with a lot on his mind. He has managed to write down his feelings and wants to share his journey with others. The university is happy to help him along the way and make his dream to publish a book come true. The book, itself, has had a cleansing effect as most writers will testify. In writing down your feelings, especially if you have had to face difficult decisions and situations in your life, you release pent-up emotions and you will feel a freedom that will help you move forward in your life.

Now that his book is published I hope Thato will be inspired to write more and grow to become a role model for other Batswana to emulate.

Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dato' Dr Limkokwing
Founder President,
Limkokwing University of Creative Technology

MESSAGE TO TAN SRI DATO' DR LIMKOKWING

Sir,

I am humbled by the work of your hands. Indeed, everything you touch turns into gold. I remember that when I looked into your eyes the first time, I could feel your powerful aura. I realised then that you are a man of significant value to the world. You are not afraid of challenge or change. Your philosophy motivates young people and students at Limkokwing University to excel. Thank you so much. You are like a rainbow of many colours that helps us define the world by day and the moonlight that helps us see stumbling blocks in the night.

Thank you for empowering a young man like me. I am a person with greater thoughts because your words have changed the way I look at everything, and how I view myself and others.

Thank you, too, for allowing me to share my experiences with the world through this book. My journey to discover my true self has led me towards understanding my purpose in life and helping others find theirs, and to give a part of myself to them.

I believe you are like the giant within every young person. When I look into the mirror, I want to see a reflection of you. You, sir, overflow my small heart with happiness. I am eternally grateful to you.

Thato Kabelo Siphon Moruti

DEDICATIONS OF A TROUBLED MIND

This book is for every individual who has witnessed his or her life go down the drain unexpectedly.

It is also dedicated to my Aunty Precious Maki who enhanced the messages in this narrative with her own experiences; Aunty Segga for her limitless family support; and my Mother Faith ... stay strong.

*It is amazing that the wise man
only comes to inspire and build the
young minds lost in the trials and tribulations
of their struggles of life who have only come
to steal and destroy the beauty of nature...
The wise men clean the dirt in
the winds of life.*

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Every person you meet adds either value or no meaning to your life. The amount of time you give to each person every time you converse tells what interest you find in that person.

PREFACE

Writing this book has been the next most motivating factor in my life after the Bible. The words in the following pages are the result of self-discovery, after much confusion and contradictions in my world and wondering which way to turn. You may have found yourself in such a situation.

This book is an attempt to give a part of myself to others who may be facing difficult situations or struggling with life. I understand what you are going through. I hope my story will help you realise that others are no less human, and no one can claim to be perfect.

Strong people are made like kites that go up against the wind.

–Thato Moruti

*The most powerful enemy I have come to know
is the one that lives inside me. Is it not enough
to know that he who is inside is more dangerous
than the one outside?*

PROLOGUE

The face: Are we who we really are?

There are people who go through experiences that make them forget who they really are. Many children don't know where they come from, and yet are blamed for not respecting their culture. When the past is shrouded in secrecy, we are not able to account for it, and this can be critical when we have to face the world. I, for one, didn't tolerate or understand the way my culture worked.

The face is a hiding place for many people — what we see on the outside is not what is inside. People are able to alter the way they look to resemble personalities in the movies or music videos, thanks to advances in the medical industry. Terrorists, murderers and child molesters hide behind various facades. These are some of the things that make the world a scary place.

The face is capable of deception. The minute you look at a person, your mind is filled with preconceived ideas or misconceptions about that person, and you tend to forget that the face is just a defensive mechanism. The face is a factor in making people lose themselves.

The world is complicated and diverse, with people holding identities that do not match their portraits. Children are not what they seem to be, and some engage in adult activities, and vice versa. There is also a new kind of evolution among my mind-your-own-business generation. Churches turn against wrongdoers. Sex workers are rarely

seen at religious places because they are afraid they are not welcome, as they are perceived to be unclean and contagious. The minds of these men and women are troubled by fear and shock. They want to change, but with the eyes of the world on them and constantly reminded that they are not worthy of life, how can they?

Societies also close their doors on the physically challenged. How can a nation prosper without every individual on the same boat? How many people living with disabilities are able to say, “I am glad that I am a part of this community?” Could it be that the disabled are actually too able for society to recognise their strengths?

How can the world grow if people do not see the need to discover the realities of their experiences? Children often see things that adults do not; how many times have children been heard to ask the same question without getting the right answer? Why can't we all be curious enough to find out the real stories behind every face? Perhaps one reason why people are caught up in their own troubles is their economic situation.

When I saw unemployed young men and women roaming the streets, the first thing that occurred to me was that they were lazy and didn't want to work, but wanted to be fed. This is probably true in some cases, but if you were to make the effort to find out, you would hear their stories and understand their situations — how they endured a difficult journey to proper education, lack of funds to travel to schools several kilometres away, having to walk for more than two hours to and from school, only to

come home to house chores and having to look after the ploughed fields.

The ways of the world can be overwhelming at times. Today, I may think I have found a way to address my struggles when in the actual fact, I may be destroying what I have tried to build for a long time.

One's teen years can bring rejections, disappointments, having to account for every action and most of all, humiliation. A rough patch during our teens can have a profound effect on our maturity into adulthood. We grow up reading books on teen life and magazines which air teenage problems and confusion and discuss drug abuse and sex among young people, with fatal consequences in many instances.

When I was growing up, I thought such publications were something the authorities used to prevent us experiencing things for ourselves. But I know now that though we may feel all fine and think we are on the right track, we are actually lying to ourselves. Our teen years are fraught with serious, tough situations, including issues of relationships and love.

*“Deep within man dwell those slumbering powers;
powers that would astonish him, that he never
dreamed of possessing; forces that would revolutionise
his life if aroused and put into action.”*

— **Orison Swett Marden**
Awaken The Giant Within by Anthony Robbins

When we experience failure, we think it is all over, and we can't try again. Some of us don't do well in examinations and we think life has failed us when in actual fact, we have failed life.

I have learned a lot over the past long years of my short life. I have found out what it means to be humiliated by people over my striking features that are a result of Ectodermal Dysplasia Syndrome. Walking in the streets of the towns and malls became unbearable, to the point where I wanted, on many occasions, to resort to substance abuse and suicide. God help me! I found out what it was to be a teenager with a rare condition, and having to face mean people. I learnt what it meant to be a strong person.

Life has also taught me that yesterday is a cancelled cheque, tomorrow is a promissory note, but today is the only cash at hand, thus it is vital to spend it wisely. One matures in the face of life's struggles. Some people, however, keep resisting these struggles. Consider every rough day a foundation of greater experiences that life has to unfold. Remember that life is too short to let our troubles decide the path we will take.

*“A challenge has a spark that can fire a world
as a man thinketh in his heart.”*

— **Anon.**

There are many philosophies or ordered ideas for living in the world today. Most have some good points that would capture the imagination of young people. But how much do the world's ideas control our lives? In many instances I believe the best philosopher in life is you; we learn from the challenges we face and decide the best course of action under particular circumstances.

Maturing in the struggles of my teens became a Logo therapy for me. I am focused on finding exactly what my life means. According to Dr Frankl and other Logo therapists:

“Man's search for meaning is a primary force in his life and not a secondary rationalism of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance that will satisfy his own will to meaning. There are some authors who contend that meaning and values are nothing but my self. I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my reaction formations. Man, however, is able to live and even die for the sake of his ideals and values.”

Imagine young people facing extraordinary challenges, and trying hard to contain them and pretend as if all is fine when it is not. In fact, they are trembling inside, seeking rectification and answers. Confused in our small worlds, we use blindfolds to keep the sun from shining in to expose our dark ways of dealing with matters that actually need light to be solved.

One day during my childhood, I found myself on a tree, my emotions at boiling point. I was angry with everybody and wanted to be treated like a

human and like other children, I wasn't even a teenager yet and already I had a lot of anger in my heart over why I was made this way, why I was from a single-parent family and separated from my biological mother. Others laughed at me because I wasn't able to do the things that most children love to do, and I was always trying to be a part of the society which kept rejecting me. I was also mad at myself for not standing up whenever others saw me as an alien creature. There were boys who refused to have anything to do with me because they were afraid of being associated with "that disabled kid" who was a bad influence on other children.

High up in the tree, I fumed, numbed by my emotions and the wire I had tied around my neck. I knew I meant do it —push myself off the tree so nature could deal with my problems. Fortunately, a man came just in time to save me from killing myself. I remember running for my life from the man who chased me with a rod in his hand as he called out to others to help catch "this crazy child".

I understand now the need to solve our misunderstood situations while our minds are clear so that we are not caught in the misery of uncontrollable situations, as this will only kill our most important weapon — the mind. These experiences will pollute the mind so much so that its functioning would not have any impact on the development of our lives.

The world gripped me in its claws for a purpose which I was eager to discover, and I knew my experience would be of help to others as they build their lives. The pains I would go through must teach me to

understand the precious life I am meant to live, but with all that was happening in my life, including my struggles, would that be possible?

There is a lot of hostility in the community we live in, and this hostility causes people to become hotchpotch. When people hurt, they try to hide what they really feel, and I began to understand that it is not easy to share inner thoughts with others in an effort to drive away the pain. I once read a poem written in 1815 entitled To Hope; it left me wondering how it would be if we didn't have people sacrificing their experiences to help us get over our hurt. Below is an excerpt from the poem.

*When by my hearth I sit,
And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom;
When no fair dreams before my mind's eye flit,
And the bare hearth of life presents no bloom
Sweet Hope, ethereal balm upon me shed,
And wave thy silver opinions o'er my head.*

The words of the poem To Hope made me feel at peace with myself. They made me believe I would make it, that I would go forward with hope, and not allow fear to destroy my life. There will be challenges to meet and overcome. These challenges can make us strong, and open our eyes to the things we never understood before.

This beautiful work reminded me of my childhood. Childhood is one of the most wonderful times of one's life, but it can also be the most

unbearable — watching and hearing people ridicule and mock you, and knowing there is nothing you can do about it because you are only a child; listening to other teenagers bubbling over the sweet treatment they received from their parents and knowing that you cannot enjoy the same can be excruciatingly painful.

Imagine what it feels like, all alone in your small world, and knowing there is no one to look up to. Dreadful, is it not? A troubled mind can make a person prone to drug abuse, among other things, in order to survive. A child needs protection from destructive elements. If we don't get proper care during our childhood, it is likely to affect the rest of our lives.

Imagine living with a rare syndrome like Ectodermal Dysplasia, My Aunt told me they didn't understand what was wrong with me. They travelled long distances to get information about my paternal side, but found nothing. I was told Mother was still a student at the time. She was in college and so was my Father. My Aunt, who was a primary school teacher, took care of me when I was just two months old. I know now that food, clothes and shelter are not enough to bring up a child. A child needs love and the warm touch of his or her mother's hands. I needed my Mother to explain why things were the way they were, why I had all this trapped in me, why God wasn't fair when he created me. When I was older, I thought I could understand that my Mother had more important things to attend to — the so-called things that help sustain our lives.

I was only 12 when I was diagnosed with Ectodermal Dysplasia Syndrome. I remember that I was preparing for my middle school final examination. I didn't understand what Ectodermal Dysplasia meant but I was fascinated by the term. It was new to my mind and I knew most people would be curious about it. I didn't know I was to find out how much it can affect a person's life.

This was my challenge — to find myself, analyse and seek meaning in my life. I would like to take you on a journey of self-discovery. Perhaps in the course of my challenges and trials in the pages of this book, you will find answers to many of your questions.

*Our lives shouldn't be like boats that sail
all alone on this huge sea.*

INTRODUCTION

The Rear-view mirror

I thought I could still do anything despite being diagnosed with Ectodermal Dysplasia (ED) Syndrome. Ectodermal Dysplasia Syndrome is a group of genetic disorders responsible for abnormalities of the skin. These abnormalities may involve sweat, saliva or tear glands. Skin problems such as eczema are not uncommon, and learning difficulties may result from frequent bouts of high fever. The ED syndrome is a complex disorder, often frustrating to understand and treat.

There are about 150 rare, incurable heritable disorders caused by genetic malfunctioning and which affect the ectoderm or outermost layer of tissue in the body. It typically affects development or functions of the teeth, nails, hair and sweat glands, depending on the particular syndrome. It can also affect the skin, the retina lens, parts of the inner ear, and development of the fingers, toes and nerves. Each syndrome involves a different combination of symptoms, ranging from malformed teeth and/or the inability to perspire which causes overheating, to hearing or vision impairment, including loss of sight. In some cases there may be frequent infections due to immune system deficiencies, and the inability of cracked or eroded skin to keep out bacteria. Cleft lip and/or palate and irregular skin pigmentation may also occur.

Defects in the ectoderm of a developing foetus deform the skin, nails, hair, sweat glands, teeth, lens of the eye and pigment cells. The bridge of the nose may be flat and the lips may protrude. The eyes may be dry or develop abrasions or cataracts. Respiratory infections are common because the normal protective secretions of the mouth and nose are not formed. In some countries ED has reportedly caused a 30% infant mortality rate.

In my ED Syndrome, the sweat produced by my body is greater in quantity and uncontrolled, with severe intolerance of heat.

Living with Ectodermal Dysplasia became something of a nightmare for me. I couldn't accept my situation, and having to face the community contributed to my low self-esteem. People may be shocked to hear that I was able to avoid addressing large groups of people so as to make my peers think I was the coolest guy around with the greatest self-esteem. Truth is, I was afraid of being asked embarrassing questions about my striking features caused by ED.

*“I know of no more encouraging fact than the
unquestionable ability of man to elevate
his life by a conscious endeavour.”*

— **Henry David Thoreau**

Awaken the Giant Within by Anthony Robbins

I wanted to shut the world out. I became more concerned about my outward appearance, and about what people would say. I made impressions by illuminating something that would draw the attention

of people away from my disability. But up till today, people want to know why my features are the way they are.

I began to get troubled by all this. Every waking minute became a question. I was seeking answers, but couldn't find myself. Questions flooded my vocabulary, and I wanted to tell somebody but was afraid that I would lose my friends or even frighten colleagues. Sometimes I even thought I was contagious.

I watched my little life, like a mirror shattered, explained by many tiny pieces. I tried to pick up the pieces, but I needed a magnifying glass to spot the thin shards of glass, and I knew they might be dangerous if stepped on, and might cut my hands if I were to pick them up.

As I looked for ways to tackle people's questions, I had to go back into history to find myself — to understand the roots of my life, collect data about myself and synthesise it so that it could change my life forever. Putting together the pieces of my life was to become a journey of self-discovery and personal experiences.

I had to consider the implications of telling people about my condition — what impact it would have on the families of the children I played with, and on the institutions of learning. Where would I go if the situation became untenable? I was in a dilemma.

I wanted to challenge many of the notions and assumptions held by people about themselves. Jose Ortegay Gasset taught me that,

“Indeed, it is of the essence of man ... that he can lose himself in the jungle of his existence, within himself, and thanks to his sensation of being lost, can react by setting energetically to work to find himself again.”

I felt I was out of touch with myself. Vincent Berry’s book of philosophy uses the old, popular expression that describes the effort to order one’s life, to define or redefine oneself — *“getting your act together”*.

The way we see ourselves is fundamental to our self-image. If we view others as essentially good, rational and free, we are inclined to find out that we are that way, too. If we think they are basically evil, irrational and free, then we might be that way too.

“Consider that many philosophers generally would have one see the self as a body and a mind. The body is physical and subject to the laws that govern matter. The mind is immaterial; it is conscious and characterised by reasoning. Unlike the body, the mind has no extensions: it is not part of the world of matter and thus is not subject to its laws.

We might even view ourselves as fields of conflict between these aspects of our nature. Furthermore, since we are the only creatures with a rational mind, we would likely experience conflict with nature; we might see ourselves as distinct from the matter of the world and as potential masters of it. In short, our mind enables us to stand apart from our environment, to find meaning and sense in the events around us. We gain freedom through self-awareness; by becoming conscious of the forces that have shaped us and the influences that have made us what we are. Freedom

is a function of self-awareness; ignorance is bondage. Through reason we can also discover how we ought to live. The way to truth is through reason, which leads to moral knowledge.

– extracted from ***Collier's Encyclopedia***

Learning more about ED made me realise we all face different situations, and alerting others to my situation would not be tantamount to asking them to feel sorry for me, but more to let those facing any kind of challenge know that if I can do it, so can they.

Indeed, the implications of a troubled mind are vast, and you could allow it to teach you and take you on a ride through the wilderness. By the time you find the island, you won't even know what happened, but you will remember to share with others the experience of going through a jungle.

When you look into the rear-view mirror of your life, you will understand why you had to go through challenges and the ups and downs of life. We all have our own ways of dealing with serious issues and most of the time, we don't realise how much we beat ourselves up during challenges. There are times when one is in despair and unable to wake up to realities, but the world only sees a perfect and focused person. I am angry with the world for raising people who suppress their real feelings about their struggles.

Your history is like a car rear-view mirror — when you view through it you realise all that you have left behind. It is challenging to look into the mirror, as you will wonder if the path ahead is clear. The mind's journey is to seek a new beginning, but before that, you have to go through a time of discovery, and understand why certain things

happened to you. Questioning yourself will take you through the wilderness (the jungle of trials) and here, your mind will question your ability to think and find strategies to get out of the jungle. It will go down memory lane and the mirror reflects your childhood memories and the realities of your life.

The way to a new beginning is also the need to transform a troubled mind into a weapon of power, to be able to face challenges readily. The troubled mind will always resist being tossed around; it prefers its comfortable spot where it makes you feel miserable and unwanted, and not worthy of life. It will jar your nerves and you may suffer migraines and unusual headaches. The mind will take you into the battlefield where you will face the roaring wonders of the jungle. You begin to get mad at trying to understand your situation, but the mind won't keep you here long because it has done its job, and it carries you through the gradient of aggression where you try to solve the problem by focusing on everything else that is not important.

Remember that the world is in our hands, and we are all what our world is, but if we do not dictate to the world our wants and needs, it will choose our destinies for us. The gradient of aggression is where everything is not what it was, and you are now about to get out of the jungle. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

At the peak of your troubles, you realise the power of perseverance. The mind now takes a new direction; it sets boundaries and arms itself with weapons of power to face life.

*Have you ever been in a plane piloted by a terrorist
—yourself! Life at its best!*

DOWN MEMORY LANE

(Childhood blessings)

I wonder how many of us would want to share how our early years were a hindrance to opportunities and blessings; the pains, trials and humiliation of having some inability caused by a disorder. I don't know if you would want to uncover the pot of sour steam when you were unable to face the neighbourhood children or were called names and given descriptions that were inhuman and humiliating. I have gone through this and a lot more, and I couldn't begin to explain how it left me with a mind that was bruised and torn apart by emotions that rendered me blind, filthy and unworthy of recovery.

My pain was so much a part of me that it felt normal and part of the daily routine of watching children play after school or on weekends, the way they treat each other, the kind of things they fight over and how they resolve their differences.

With their free minds, children can be very observant and focused on small things that grown-ups sometimes don't realise. Watch them as they are seated by the gate at home or walking home after school, and listen carefully — you would hear them joking about a particular person's looks or lack of appeal, or making other discouraging comments. They

particularly like talking about others' disabilities or strangeness, even the kind of noses people have. They ridiculed one boy's mother whose hands were not proportioned to such an extent that the boy began to isolate himself because he couldn't defend his mother.

People don't realise what this child goes through. When he parts with his classmates, he pretends all is fine, and hurries home because he doesn't want to upset his heart any further. At home, he finds a welcoming atmosphere and it calms his mind so much that he forgets to share what he had gone through earlier. While this child's mind is still growing and carefree, one thing's for sure, all these experiences pile up in his mind and may have a destructive effect on him.

Imagine looking into a mirror and your reflection reminding you of an incident at a shopping complex where a group of boys poked fun at your looks as you walked by. The pain cuts deep. The mirror tells you that you have sparse hair and your skin is scaly like that of a reptile. The question is, do you agree with it and break down and start swearing? Are you afraid to be humiliated? Has the mirror not spared you?

*Whilst the world can only be seen but not looked at inside
Whilst our heart beat drums that can only be heard
but not listened to
Whilst the thick moist air that surrounds us,*

can only be sensed but not felt
Whilst the devil continues to step upon us as his doormat
Whilst many of us continue to run the race and not win
Do we ever question the master of it all?
Do we ever question the creator, Mother Nature of life?
The one who made us from simple soil
A God of love, not democracy
Whose grace and mercy are felt at the foot of the cross?
Whose heart is ever filled with joy and peace towards us?
The one who makes our coats snow white
The one who makes impossibilities, possible?
The God who turns us from nothing to something
The one who commands the sun where to head in the morning
— Inspiration by **Thabo Moinga**

The tears fall even as you try to hold them back. My mind kept reminding me that strong minds are motivated by dynamic situations. But one would wonder why challenges choose the “wrong” people. I was screaming out the Lord’s name. I needed his touch more than I ever needed anybody’s help. I was mad about my situation. I wanted to know why he had to make it look like I was the only person with such a disability. My blistered mind abused my thoughts to the extent that I wanted to cut contact with God. But then I remembered my Father in Heaven, and His words of how He is sending us forth as

sheep in the midst of wolves. I heard my consciousness telling me that the Lord is giving me the formula of action: *Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves*. I knew it was difficult to imagine myself having, simultaneously, characteristics of a serpent and a dove, but I knew this is what Jesus expected of me — to have a tough mind and a tender heart.

I wasn't done with the Lord though. I still had questions that I needed answers to since confusion lingered around me. I fell on my knees and cried out to God to show me a sign that He was there during my troubles, trials and tribulations. I want to understand the deeper things of God, the reasons why some things are the way they are. Make me see with your eyes, my Father, I prayed, make me feel what you feel, fill me with your spirit of understanding and enable me to interpret worldly behaviour the way you would interpret it.

As the Lord dealt with my pain behind the door of my bedroom, I felt it was time to clean up my room and start afresh with a new friend who knew how to soften my heart when it is in pain. I closed the windows of my bedroom; I didn't want the wonderful atmosphere I felt after having a conversation with the Lord to escape. I wanted to know why he would ridicule me in front of everyone, yet, at the same time I thought he was a master of virtue and character, so why would he turn me into a laughing stock, the brunt of every cruel joke?

I began to understand what the Lord wanted me to know all this time

— it isn't my strength but the strength of the God; not by might or power, but by His grace that I am able to face all the situations and tribulations. People are amazed when they see the extent of my disability. But because He poured his Spirit into me, He made it all different — he wanted me to be a blessing to someone. I wanted to continue talking to God. I wanted him to mentor me and change me into a new creature, a new heart to be able to understand people poking fun at me over my disability.

As He listened — a patient and compassionate Father — I knew I could cast all my burdens unto Him, after 19 years of carrying the burden, emotionally imprisoned by Ectodermal Dysplasia, isolating myself because of my striking features, and inflicting upon myself pain of blame and rejection.

Fortunately, the Lord made me understand that analysis is not the only way to resolve inner conflicts. I knew I had to tell all what I had gone through. I had to at least tell someone else how I started and how I sought God to explain to me why all this was happening.

The devil had set me up in an atmosphere that appeared real, to try and keep me trapped in the situation. Fear gripped its claws on me, immobilised me for what seemed like eternity. But no more, thanks to Him whom I have received in my heart. My prayer was for Him to make something new of my life.

Should I go the extra mile so that I can be part of the community? Am I not worthy of society's friendship? I tried, but was stigmatised. My Ectodermal Dysplasia brought me sorrow. I tried to overcome challenges and circumstances that threatened to overwhelm me, but that only alleviated the tension in my heart. I experienced irritable sleep. Ectodermal Dysplasia claimed a part of my life. I even disliked myself intensely and could not do anything about it. I developed a strained attitude and remorse, and I feel like giving up on life. I also thought I could be facing a great weakness in my morality, am I crippled by the real truth of my life?

There are moments in life that seem too great to handle: they either burst upon you unexpectedly or like a giant wave they build up gradually; you know they are coming but there is nothing you can do to prevent them crashing down on you. Such moments can strike fear into your heart, paralyse your thinking and prevent you from acting either sensibly or constructively

— *Faith for Daily Living*, June 1981

I defined myself as useless and unworthy of remaining in this universe. I was ashamed of myself — after all, I am a disabled, dark, ugly, lightly pigmented lad whose face was like that of a developing ape trying to adapt to human life. My skin was scaly like that of a reptile, so why should I be right for society? I knew I was different from other children.

Describing myself so disgustingly became a reality in my daily life, and people began seeing me the way I saw myself. People in the streets as well as my friends were curious as to why my features were so different from theirs. Having to meet people was horrible as I was afraid of being humiliated. What if I scared other children? I also thought I was adopted because I was different from the rest of my family.

Imagine how childhood can make you think a disability defines a certain type of person, although you know nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so. We are all disabled in some way, but most of us cannot grasp our disability. Some of us have big mouths but because we always describe them as sexy and kissable we do not really see the disability in them. Some people have teeth shaped like those of a grim reaper, but they see themselves better than Ben Affleck or Will Smith or even Jennifer Lopez.

Standard One was a very important time of my life. On the first day of school I woke early to make sure my uniform was ready, and tried on my shoes again to make sure that they still fitted, though they were new. It was 6am when my Aunt's house assistant checked on me to make sure I wore the uniform correctly. She kept advising me to stand tall before everyone and not be frightened by the teachers. She said some children have bruised emotions because of what their seniors did or said to them, and that it is essential to like myself, and to think myself acceptable, worthy of respect and admiration. Although I didn't understand what she meant, I kept her words in my heart.

But I had many questions about the children with bruised emotions. I wanted to know the cause. My mind kept saying I was not like those children. I wouldn't let anyone push me around. This was a serious time of life and I was not about to let anyone ruin it for me; if they did, I would show them the other side of me.

As I tried to put on a bold face, I wanted this lady to tell me why she thought other children would bruise my emotions. Today, I understand — she knew many children would be interested in me — my pigmented hair, scaly skin and, of course, my smile.

Aunty, as I called her, knew it was typical of children to make fun of others. She was warning me. Today, I understand that my troubled mind surfaced a long time ago. Was she trying to protect me or just showing motherly concern? Did she feel I was not ready to face the world?

Those are some of the things I wanted to understand. How many people go through the same situation as me, feeling neglected and yet cannot break free from the chains of bondage to their parents, friends or family?

These issues can be overwhelming when analysed. They can grip your thinking and paralyse your functioning. Children face situations which they are not able to communicate to their parents out of fear. The stress these children feel keeps piling until a certain age, when their reflections in the mirror remind them of these tragedies.

Do mothers and fathers who claim that parenting is a skill that comes with the pains of labour, not feel pain when their children find themselves in confusing and challenging circumstances? Is it a lack of parenting skills or is it society that robs children of their hopes and dreams?

My Aunt walked with me to school on my first day. I remember we carried some firewood. Children were required to bring wood so that they would know how their food was cooked. When we arrived at the school, I realised many students were staring and pointing at me, which made me uncomfortable and embarrassed.

In the months that followed, there were times when I felt very uncomfortable in class because my classmates found my sweating disturbing. The teachers even approached my Aunt to get some information about my condition. Although I was uncomfortable, it didn't undermine my intention to be a good student and I excelled in my studies. I didn't compare myself with others; I was driven by the motto "I am different and special".

It was in Standard Two that I started to realise things were different, when other children began asking me why I had fluffy hair and why I didn't grow adult teeth like them. My mind was blistered with questions I had no answers to, and which I wanted to know as much as they did. I was very uncomfortable around my classmates and friends because I was afraid of their questions and the way they kept staring at me.

Primary school was nice, though, because I was a child and these things didn't matter, I thought to myself. It was fine because just as my schoolmates made jokes like I was a vampire because of my cone shaped front teeth and light hair, I too, made jokes at their expense.

Still, I was haunted by my thin and sparse hair, and lack of sweat glands that caused me to sweat excessively in the heat. I was afraid to share my skin condition with others, including my cousins and other relatives. I had to grit my teeth and bear the humiliation.

I realised most of my friends didn't understand me, but my family treated me like any other child. Still, they didn't understand my emotions. I was emotionally bruised and coiled up inside and I couldn't share that, not even with my family.

I wanted to keep busy all the time because I wanted to let go. Sometimes I cried because I couldn't understand why the lotion I used wasn't working. I also had food allergies. Sometimes I would get angry with my Aunt, and tell her I am not part of her family and she shouldn't tell me what to and what not to do. I was boiling inside.

I remember the only friends I had were some girls I played with at primary school. We played in my Aunt's backyard, where we started a small play about our everyday experiences. During these play sessions I demonstrated how I felt when other students laughed at me so that the

girls would feel some empathy and tell other students I wasn't happy about the way they treated me. Sometimes I felt like playing football with other boys, but it was not easy because they liked to touch my head and laugh at me. I remember one time when I was asked to fight with one of the boys from the village because he supposedly made fun of me.

When I transferred to a school in town, I told myself things were going to be different since children in the city were said to be different. I was wrong. On the first day of term in the new school, my classmates laughed at me. God! There were times that when I started to sweat in class, resulting in my shirt getting soaked, and my classmates felt my sweat would affect them if they come in contact with it.

It was here that I knew I was going through a tough situation of trying to accept my past and struggling to understand what the world wanted of me. I found people in town were more scared and frightened than those where I came from. Making friends was priceless to me as many students didn't want to be associated with Fluffy, as they nicknamed me.

I began retreating to the voice mail room to keep away from trouble. I wanted to approach the world differently, and stay away from the vultures and predators who wanted to destroy my inner ego; the giant in my heart.

Now, after looking into the rear-view mirror, I realise the reality of a troubled mind — it is the sick and ill-mannered families and societies

that encourage children to go through overwhelming situations and even claim their lives.

My journey continues — to find the truth about the struggles of life. There is much that needs to be unfolded and shared with the rest of the community. People don't know what we hide under our sheets and pillows. These silent killers are claiming many young people's lives. What could I do to pave the way for the dot-com generation if I myself was drowning in the realities of my unstructured life?

Rise above the level of circumstances.

THOUGHTS OF THE HEART

Every individual faces trials, and each individual's life depends on him or herself. I realise people have to be ready to face the world, but will I — drowning midstream — make it? The evils of world and challenges threaten the survival of my generation. Thus, individual challenges become the world's as well. A French philosopher said;

“No man is strong unless he bears within his character antitheses strongly marked.”

Martin Luther King said:

“The idealists are not usually realistic, and the realists are not usually idealistic. The militant are not generally known to be passive nor the passive to be militant. Seldom are the humble self-assertive, or the self-assertive humble, but life at its best is a creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony.”

Understanding the thoughts of our hearts is one of our greatest challenges. The rhythm of the heart is in tune with the rhythm of the mysteries of life. The trials and tribulations of a disabled mind are a mechanism of either the development or downfall of that individual.

There are times when one feels the need to contemplate the challenges

they face and their lives. The mind is a very active tool that helps us realise the struggles of life and maybe even help us find weapons of power to solve or overcome these trials. At times, the mind is slow and does not react actively enough to situations. The repercussions of our decisions make us feel we have failed.

I believe I have, at times, killed my potential because of my troubled mind and a heart that didn't seek a new beginning. I have allowed others to use me as a doormat or an elevator button. It was as if the thoughts of my heart were deceiving me and pointing to a wrong direction. Such instances cause us to fall short of our abilities and opportunities. We fail to realise that positive criticism will lead to perfection. But what is positive criticism? Is it about the world looking into us and finding the bad and not the good? Is it to accept suppression by the world and fall into its claws? Is this what most of us accept of the world or of ourselves?

Are we wasting our time floundering midstream, drowning in the deep waters of situations we thought we could handle? There were times when I couldn't believe that I was facing a situation; when I was in denial of my medical condition and couldn't accept my blindness. I could only pretend I was strong; fear built a tower inside me.

We often fall short of our capabilities and miss opportunities because we are afraid of ridicule. We fail to realise that positive criticism can lead to perfection. Instead of looking at the world squarely in the face

and letting it know that I control my life and not the other way round, I have been wasting my time floundering midstream.

As I paused to listen to the deepest thoughts of my heart, I realised I had missed a lot more of life than I thought I did. Being disabled has been one of the most difficult blocks of my life. The mind becomes polluted with unclean thoughts. You want to be like others, have fruitful relationships and friends like other people, go to the movies with them and chat about life and its struggles, but because of your condition you can't afford the embarrassment of hearing questions you don't want to answer and the emotions they carry.

My mind tried to destroy my life. It imparted sick and paralysing thoughts about living with a condition or disability. But growing up taught me a lesson about being in connection with my inner self, like a song that sings in my mind. I should have heard my inner self piercing my heart with a spear, and realised that challenges will always be these and how I face them will depend on the strength of my inner self.

A tough mind and tender heart is the key to being able to say "I can make it". The Bible says I have been fearfully and faithfully made, so I should celebrate my being with confidence and gratification because I am made for a purpose and a reason, regardless of how people describe me.

There were times when I felt left out and everyone could see that I didn't

fit in. The heart becomes desolate and dehydrated, it feels it's dying and can't handle the situation. Everybody is busy and don't realise there are sheep lost in the midst of thunder and lightning. The mind takes us beyond our capabilities of reasoning, it puts us in a world where there is only you and you alone. You know there is no one you can trust with your secrets and deeper, more serious matters, or how you really feel when you come across a stumbling block.

The heart begins to create an atmosphere revolving around the people it wants to consider a part of it by trying to adapt to challenging situations. In my case, the heart takes me back to the days when I was sitting on a cement stoop and began to feel my body heating up and my heart racing. I knew it was bleeding, right from infancy. The heart reminds you of the wonderful moments in the environment you grew up in, the kinds of food you ate, the friends you associated with, your classmates, colleagues, teachers and the community. The heart wants to single you out of the multitudes to show you that you are the only one of your kind.

The nightmares of your life start to unfold as your heart helps you seek your real self. It pumps more blood, and you realise there is a mountain you have to remove. It remembers all the indifference you have suffered. The mind pins you against the walls of hate, blame and rejection, and you feel the world has closed its walls on you before

you can reach out. The mind starts removing your ability to believe in yourself and to overcome circumstances. It tells you the world is too busy for you, and that you can't make friends and you can never be like people around you.

As the heart prepares you for battle, it puts you in a corner, flashing pictures of your life before you. It focuses on events involving your family — people you spent most of your time with, and who you are supposed to share your ups and downs with. It takes you through your struggles and the support and encouragement you received from your family.

When we are hurt it feels as if we are carrying a heavy weight in our chests. That's because the heart is dripping under immense pressure. We take deep breaths, trying to control the pain we feel inside. This is why people sometimes hold their chests when they cry. Your head begins to analyse the situations facing you and it becomes saturated with thoughts, questions and confusion, torturing your heart.

As my suffering mounted, I realised there were two ways in which I could respond to situations — with bitterness or seek to transform suffering into a creative force. I tuned myself to the latter. I tried to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal others involved in tragic situations. I try to live my years in the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.

*The heart and mind are the steering wheels of
the human reaction to nature and its challenges.*

The touch of a nine-year-old

It is amazing how another human being can change your life — how you look at things and how they are done. I believe children have a gift; they often see what others do not. I once heard a story about a young girl named Felicity who claimed to have dreams of soldiers invading her country. The eight-year-old American girl stayed near the army camp, but when she tried to share her dreams, people thought she was only dreaming of things she had seen in her area. As a result, she became scared to talk about her dreams. She would wake up at night, trembling and frightened by the recurring dreams. On those occasions she would get out of bed and pray to God to stop the soldiers from invading her country and killing the people she loved.

As the story goes, it was months before her mother Eleanor became concerned about her daughter. Felicity was starting to lose weight due to the trauma of her bad dream. Her mother decided to buy her daughter a dream catcher, believing that her daughter would be fascinated by its design and perhaps then her dreams would go away. She put the dream catcher at the head of Felicity's bed and told her that whenever the dream came she should tell Mother Nature to throw the bad soldier

into the dream catcher's net. The girl was excited and thought the net would help her forget the bad man who visited her dreams.

One afternoon as Felicity was playing with her dolls, she noticed that the table on which she always placed the cups and doll clothes had been moved. Felicity knew someone had been in her room and that it was not her mother. She knew it wasn't a dream any more, and felt something heavy in her heart. Something told her that the day had come; the soldiers were coming. But she was too scared to tell her mother, as she knew that she wouldn't believe her.

As the sun went down that day, Felicity asked her mother if she could sleep with her in her bedroom. Eleanor found this strange and realised her daughter was scared about something, and that she was troubled by her dreams. She knew she had to get help for her daughter. She decided to call the local doctor the next morning.

It was about 6:15pm and as she prepared dinner, she chided herself for not thinking of it sooner. Eleanor was worried about her daughter, but little did she know her little girl was dreaming of a war that had already begun. Before she could even dish out dinner, she heard guns and booms outside the house. She heard people screaming and shouting.

Felicity came running into the kitchen, saying, "Mom, they are here, they are here." Eleanor was shocked and frightened, she realised it was

not a dream, but actually a vision that her daughter had. She wondered if it was the work of God or nature. She was confused and hurt that she didn't listen to her daughter from the beginning.

The soldiers killed more than 40,000 men and women in their town. Felicity and Eleanor's lives were spared, though they were kept in separate camps. Eleanor continued to be deeply troubled by the episode of her daughter's dream and cried whenever she recalled it.

The pure minds of children may deceive the experienced minds of adults. I am sharing the story of Felicity because I realise the need to know that both the heart and the mind control human behaviour. Felicity knew she was not just dreaming, but was being warned of something, though nobody listened to her. Children can teach us a lot.

Many children have done awesome things for me. Some realised they changed my thoughts about life, while others are unaware of their effect and influence over me.

One day in January 2004, I arrived home from school tired and depressed after an argument with my best friend. He had embarrassed me by telling people about my condition, and saying I was hiding from telling people what I was suffering from. I was very hurt by that because I thought I could trust him. I sat at the dining table, thinking about the episode. My mind was becoming polluted with bad thoughts.

The mind takes control of you, especially when you are going through challenging situations. I was tired of what people thought of me, how I looked and my condition. I was feeling sorry for myself when my young cousin came and sat next to me. He asked if I was all right. I responded, “Sure I am.” The nine-year-old boy kept quiet for sometime and then asked if he could speak. I wondered why he would suddenly ask permission to speak.

He said, “I know that you don’t think I know this, but I think you are worried that we don’t like you because you are different from us — the way you look, your hair and all. Really, Thato, we don’t care about what other people think of you. Here, at home, we love you so much, we would even kill if something were to happen to you.”

Hearing the child say those words and knowing I had just had a traumatic experience, I was amazed, happy and moved. My mind couldn’t believe what it had just heard. Since that day I have much respect for children. I know children make a big difference in our lives.

My young cousin taught me to be open-minded and not to jump to conclusions when looking at people. If need be, confront them and ask, and they will surely share their story with you.

*Your heart is the foundation of all things that
happen to you, keep it clean and soothed.*

THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND

My mind became a warring ground for ideas on life and death. It was swayed by the strong waves of the past and the wounds in my heart, dancing to the tune of my heart. Like a referee, the heart controls a match but not the actual game itself; it is more like a traffic officer that controls the cars on the roads, but not the souls behind the steering wheels.

In my small world of trials and tribulations, it dawned on me that a man's destiny begins in his mind. Many philosophers have said success is just an idea away. This is because the sound mind interprets dreams and achievements, desire and lust, needs and wants, fact and truth. A sound mind can take you anywhere. It is where faith emerges, and is the only tool that insists there isn't a mountain too high. However, the unsound capacity of the heart can also lead to anywhere. Remember that everywhere in life is not necessarily anywhere.

Once you make a stand, and decide that your satanic mind will not trip you up, you are on the right track. You have complete control over your mind. Sometime ago, I wrestled with stressful thoughts in my mind. The reason many people are subject to stress is that their problems take centre stage in their minds. They spend their lives recapping problems of the past. Be aware that you own your mind, and not the other way round. Otherwise, you will keep surfing in an ocean of endless

questions, and you will keep dreaming about your promised land — the land of milk and honey — but never living or experiencing it.

The workings of the human mind are mysterious. The ingenious mind that discovered AIDS virus which continues to spell death sentences for many people, is also a worm in the skulls of rapists preying on innocent targets. Picture a man who holds a position in society raping an infant. What does your mind make of it? Insane, immoral, cruel, you would probably think. What if the same man is your human resource manager and the fate of your employment depends on him? Our minds work at very different levels, and we sometimes undermine it.

Is there a distinction between knowledge of the heart and that of the mind? Does a polluted heart control the mind or does a polluted mind control the heart? I was confused and restless. I wanted to understand what makes up the thinking process. Does a man emerge out of his mind or heart?

I was in a depression as I pondered over what I was going through and what I had to face after sharing with others the realities of Ectodermal Dysplasia. The question was what people would say when they found out about me.

As I analysed my thoughts, I consulted the big book of norms and guidance — the Bible. I wanted to understand how God could help

me in a situation which I needed to drive out of my life. I realised that biblically, the heart includes the mind or intellect. Everyone who knows something, knows it in his or her heart.

I began to understand that it is in our own hearts that we can trace the light when we face trouble. The heart is responsible for finding the right path; it actually seeks pastures and then commands the mind to activate responses, thus helping the other parts of the body, like the mouth, to utter the heart's response to its situation.

I believe that a person may have a good, sound mind, an excellent mind even, without a humble heart. There must be a balance; yin and yang, day and night, good and evil must co-exist. The mind and heart work hand-in-hand.

The heart gives us hope to go on, but the mind fights the desires of the flesh, to stop mourning the 'ifs' of life and start living.

What's on your mind?

There are two fields of activity in a troubled mind — the past and the future. From the past the mind builds up memory, evaluations, impressions of what may threaten selfhood and what may extend it. The mind finds a way to build a defensive wall against the misconceptions of society. It is true that the greatest thing in this world is not so much where we stand, but which direction we are heading. But I believe what is greater is where we are now, for it is this moment that determines our tomorrow. Living today means maximising the moment and confronting the demons of this day before tomorrow comes.

My mind controlled my life and took its toll on it. I was its victim of its unsound capabilities and I suffered the penalty. It didn't occur to me to tame or control it. I regarded it as a monster that I could never step on, but which, instead, could step on me, and indeed, it did, crushing me in the process.

Like everybody else, I desire to control my mind and not be controlled by it. Freedom means liberation. So, before we can fight any social stigma, we have to battle the deceptions of our own minds. We must seek to develop our lives and live in the best way we can, and find joy and harmony in life.

Life also sets us difficult tasks in which we are all responsible to one another. Many have lost the guiding thread that would have led to a

happy life; others almost drowned in their perverse society. Some in such a situation may feel incapable of breaking free. It feels as if we are hemmed in on all sides and crushed by evil forces of every kind within ourselves and in the society around us. Yet, we yearn to be free from all human strangleholds. Liberation lies hidden in our deceptive minds.

So, there I was, trying to analyse myself and understand why I was having a tough time looking for a change and a new beginning. I reflected on my past and attained conceptual development. My mind wanted to grasp and achieve the truth about the situations I was fighting. I was on the threshold of liberation.

As the truth about self-knowledge became clearer, it revealed that the root cause of a troubled mind might indeed, be found within it. A physical mind faces a long struggle before it discovers and appreciates its constitution.

Many philosophers have reasoned that the mind is nothing more than an exquisite organisation of atoms interacting with one another and the environment to produce both the internal and external activities of a conscious creature. I came to understand that the mind interacts with the sensibilities of the world as it tries to respond to situations. The mind then begins to re-build and re-establish its own well-being and structure that can accommodate challenges.

I fell apart trying to make sense of my Ectodermal Dysplasia Syndrome and others' pre-conceived ideas about my striking features. My medical condition was already enough of a nightmare to bear, and the thought of having to live with my striking “fluffy” hair, having to learn to use dentures and eyeglasses, and to live with excessive sweat was beyond my mind's comprehension.

My mind was also bombarded by others' reactions towards my condition. But the mind, though filled with apprehension, is not stupid, and reacts fast to situations that are overwhelming, trying to reach as many solutions as possible.

“Familiar human experiences of the external world are in large measure constructed by the active human mind.”

— German philosopher Immanuel Kant

As Kant points out, inner sense, thoughts, sensations and other aspects of the mind are constructed by the mind. The mind's access to itself is equally mediated by its structural and conceptual contributions, and is no more direct than its access to the rest of the world.

“Anyone who suffers a minor injustice from someone else can forgive or refuse to forgive. But this is a two-edged sword; if you don't forgive, you will not be forgiven either.”

— Archbishop A. Bloom

As the words of Archbishop Bloom found its way into my head, my mind yearned for something more — to understand why I was going through tough personal decisions, and why I should forgive my fellow men for their lack of understanding.

The realisation of our existence as human beings depends on the normal functioning of our mind, and any disorder or disease attacking the mind becomes a serious matter. A sprained joint or cut foot can spell doom for an animal that depends on mobility for survival, whereas the same injury is often not more than a painful inconvenience to us. Slight impairments of our mind, especially those caused by humiliating experiences, can cause intense pain. Our complex emotions are linked to the functioning of the mind.

“Anxiety, guilt and frustration function better than a mind free of undue worries and conflicts.”
— *Streams of Consciousness* by William James

As the American philosopher William James put it, streams of consciousness are separate and autonomous powers or faculties of the mind. Perceiving, reasoning, attending to and imagining what the world/society has against us becomes a constant worry. How we receive certain things from people triggers sensory stimulation. In experiencing the cruelty of the society’s behaviour or attitudes, the mind uses nonsensical syllables to establish principles of retention and

omission. The mind then holds the body responsible for actions it can't be accountable for.

Trying to vent your feelings becomes almost a catharsis, before you realise human motivation is unconscious. The relationship between sensory input and subsequent behaviour is complex, intricate and variable, and the mind is capable of pretending all is fine when it is not.

The mind sets itself in common sense beliefs which include those from the growth period, childhood, experiences and family history. Pain, for example, becomes nothing but a certain stimulation of preconceptions about life. Depression might be a temporary deficit of some sort. The relevant mental identities create the direction of the mind.

What defines a given mental state is the entire set of actual and potential causal relations it has to certain circumstances, and the behavioural output. For example, a given state counts as pain if it is caused by bodily injury. Trauma causes distress and pain and a desire to get rid of it. What causes pain is the overall functional role it plays in the complex and causal-related functional states.

Functionalism of the mind can pose obstacles to identity, if, for instance, pain is seen in a variety of ways. We will discover that the internal dynamics of the functioning brain have a very different structure from that pictured in our common sense concepts. The misleading character

of these concepts will become evident and in the long run will be eliminated and replaced by concepts provided by a new framework. Our self-conception, in other words, is destined to undergo a radical change. If we could listen to the thoughts of our minds, we would not like what we hear.

*The mind will find a place for itself to toss
your abilities around and make you feel small,
it creates an atmosphere — the battlefield.*

THE STRUGGLE TO REALISE

My whole life had been an attempt to create skeletons in my own cupboard. What I relied on — the strength of my inner self — could not sustain me during my trials and tribulations. I was alone during my challenges, deserted and denied by my inner man.

Society teaches us to mask or suppress our feelings, but when our inner strength is weak, we have to train ourselves to do the opposite. We must release our feelings. I found that very difficult to do. When I mastered the art of suppressing my feelings, society called it maturity. I was considered a better person when I suppressed what I felt, without expressing my true self or my true beliefs. Society can be narrow-minded, regarding a successful person as one who can suppress his or her thoughts and feelings in order to achieve a certain level of living.

Yet, the most “wonderful and mature” people by society’s standards often end up crashing emotionally at some point in their lives. Why? Because it is only natural to have emotions and desires, and somewhere along the line, the real person will emerge out of the stored can of emotions. When that time comes, if we do not find a positive outlet for our true feelings, the results could be tragic.

I believe that’s why many people are in prison. We hear of men and women being sent to prison for killing their spouses and children.

Some children even kill their abusive parents. It explains our pandemic of rapes, thefts and white collar crimes. All of these have a common root. Many of the people who commit these crimes were conditioned never to express what they really felt — whether it was anger, bitterness or even happiness. They were not given an outlet for their feelings, nor were they heard and helped. They reached boiling point —when they could no longer keep their feelings inside — and exploded. As a result, other people, including those they loved, were hurt and possibly even lost their lives. This happens when people do not trust enough to express themselves completely.

My heart was saturated with the numerous scars of my life, and as a result, my mind was beginning to be controlled by my heart. Many people are touched by the nitty-gritty of my ability to survive, but they are still not willing to listen to the trials of my life.

The outward symptoms of my syndrome continued to attract curiosity and this began to crash my emotions. I tried to ignore everything. But I was no longer a child whose life was mapped by others. I was the architect of my own life. I was surrounded by corrosive demons and I failed to realise my authority over the problem.

How was I to cope with people who tormented me all the time, even when the shadow of my presence was considered useless? They painted an image of me that was from the deepest, darkest pit in hell. Was this

a measure of what I had to go through in order to be called a survivor? My soul was aggrieved and hurt, how was I to disguise the sorrows of my heart? It felt like I was thrown into the deep end and it was a question of sinking or swimming, and each time I tried to summon an inner resolve, the ball rolled faster.

On top of all this, as I was growing up, the task of defining the world continued to be difficult and subtle. Many questions about the world were still unanswered. I wanted to know why we live in the twilight that knows no victory or defeat. Is life fancy rather than plain? Why are there rejections, discriminations and stigmas? Am I a social reject without a claim to any human right, or to love and acceptance from society? I failed to understand why the Lord seemed so far away when He is actually sitting next to us.

I was growing up in a society where people made jokes daily about my hair and facial features. I asked myself why I was treated this way. Still, I had faith that God would see me through primary school without having to go through humiliation and embarrassment. In fact, I made it to high school.

High school brought a whole new environment. I remember sitting at one of the outdoor teaching areas, watching other children as they enjoyed themselves. I knew I couldn't. Tears ran down my cheeks ... how much of what I have tried to build for myself, will this syndrome destroy? It was showing me it was tougher than me.

Some students even thought I had HIV/AIDS. One day, some girls asked for a piece of meat I was eating. One of them then asked the other if she wasn't afraid of contracting the pandemic, that is, HIV/AIDS. I was discouraged. The syndrome is here to stay, so I had better face it, but how?

*'How' is what every human wants to know
whenever the winds of challenge blow against
the gradient of self-discovery, 'how' is where
I wouldn't go, but 'what' is how I would like
to face the situation.*

The “if onlys” of our lives

In all the challenges I faced, my main concern has been, “If only I could do this”, “if only this was like that”. Every time I am faced with a challenge I wonder about the “what if”.

It is intriguing that many people look elsewhere for answers when the answers are in front of our noses. Our problem is fear of the truth, but we can take advantage of it and change others, or work to perfect ourselves through our mistakes and experiences. The “if onlys” rob us of our determination to face life with more enthusiasm and our belief that we can make it through the jungle.

As I tried to analyse myself and understand why I still saw life as an “if only”, my heart wanted to understand why I was focused on wishing,

because I did not want to look back later and think “if only” I had wished for a better way to do things.

My mind focused on wanting to realise — to find out whether it was wrong to wish for something in my life. All I wanted was for people to leave me alone and let me be with my Ectodermal Dysplasia. I was fed up of people looking at me wherever I went. My heart’s concern was to be careful not to take the wrong turn and see my life going down the drain.

The “if onlys” tend to dictate how we should live our lives... “if only” my mother had realised I was her son 20 years ago, then I would consider her a Mother today.

I am amazed at what the human mind can put us through, but are they the desires of our hearts? That is what I was struggling to realise as I looked into the mirror in my bedroom. I looked outside the window and realised the wind will always blow and the trees will try to fend for themselves. But our tribulations, just like the wind, will fight back our protective mechanisms as we try to drive away our pains and struggles. We will realise that the wind is a strong or destructive movement, or a compelling force or influence.

We can equate our problems to the wind—a strong or destructive movement or current that makes us forget we have lives to live; it makes us think the only way to solve anything is by becoming as destructive as the wind. Such winds become compelling forces or influences in many people’s lives.

Do not harden your heart when change becomes inevitable in your life, the struggles of life teach us how to face realities.

THE GRADIENT OF AGGRESSION

I have been going through a jungle of people deriding my appearance and telling me how I am supposed to look in the society in which I, too, have a right to live. In every decision I make, I have to consider what people will say and how they will react to my actions and even the way I dress. I have grown tired of pleasing people, and of their inquisitiveness. Why can't we all be concerned about making our environment fit and healthy for everybody, regardless of where they come from, how they look or their abilities?

I can't walk in the Mall without someone making a silly joke about me. It makes me mad and I want to explode because I am as human as them. I am entitled to this land and to shop in the Mall like everyone else. I see young people pointing their fingers at me, I hear them labelling me with unkind words and looks that make me feel unwanted and dirty.

One day, a group of boys at the Mall were talking about me as I walked by. They were laughing, pointing at me, clearly enjoying as they poked fun at me. I felt very uncomfortable. One of them called out to me. He had a sarcastic look as I walked towards him. I was fuming, and I knew the time had come to face challenges head-on. When I reached the group, I got the questions I expected — about my appearance.

Another situation occurred some time after that, in which someone offered me medicine with claims that it could restore my hair to its

natural state. This person did not bother to ask if I was ill, or if it was natural, or if I was undergoing treatment. How would you have reacted if you had been in my place?

In such situations you think you are dealing with it by teaching people a lesson so they'll know you are also human. You fume and want to grab him with your hands and make him feel what his degrading words do to you. You think that will drive the problem away.

The steep gradient of my emotions reached a point where I knew it was time to face the giant that haunted me, casting shadows of fear over me, and torturing my ego. I thought I was going to teach those who made fun at me, that they would get what was coming to them. This fear destroyed the inner man in me, and blinded me.

*“What is that thunder that dooms within my chest,
that lightning that crashes in my head?
What is that silence so still it cannot be heard,
that darkness I cannot see when I am dead?
It is the unknown, permeating my body
and stopping my mind.
I know only its looming shadow;
and that shadow is fear.”*

– Patricia June Dozier

Fear Is Self by Rush W. Dozier Junior

As fear settled in my heart, it unleashed bitter emotions which alleviated my aggression towards everything, and every person I spoke to. My bitterness grew within like a tornado. It raised my disgust towards my friends. I was convinced they kept my company because they pitied me, and I wanted them to stay away. I became more egocentric and developed an inflated sense of self-importance.

The gradient of aggression made me want to explode. I didn't want to be civil to people who only wanted to make my life miserable, or be considerate of the fact that they may not know what I was going through. I only wanted to pounce on everybody, even the innocent. When people approached me, they were reproached. My bitter emotions made me feel more vulnerable and pained me even more. All I could think of was that I didn't want people to think lowly of me. I ended up preferring to be unapproachable.

*The gradient of aggression builds within an
unwillingness to change one's heart.*

PERSEVERING THROUGH HARD TIMES

Life is a journey, and we are given a certain number of rivers to cross during our lifetime; these are our trials and tribulations that teach us about the living waters. The question is how fast are you going to swim to make it to the bank.

The unusual depths of life are known as hard knocks. But what are these unusual depths? They are simply part of your road to growth, which facilitates your liberation. For some, this could mean their last supper or a continuum with moments of drama, stupefying boredom and/or resignation. Mother Teresa once said, “To heal other people, you have to suffer yourself.”

The time is now! It is time to achieve an equilibrium in our lives. Until then, we will keep questioning the unusual depths of our lives. It is time to dig deep into your spiritual resources that sustained you during your darkest hours, when you felt bombarded from every direction; when, with blood racing and sweat pouring, you had a mountain to overcome and you were alone.

*How deep can we dig to find the paths that
lie beneath our feet, how much of our emotions can
persevere through hard times?*

Inner strength

We are born alone and we will depart from this world alone. We are also alone as we face our challenges. This is where we have to snuff out any addiction to approval and comparisons. For we are placed on this earth not to see through one another, but to see one another through.

You will conquer the world with your power and strength. You can stand up and fight for what you believe in, but if you have no inner strength in your heart, you will never fly high. If you have no clue as to who you are in this world, your mission will not be accomplished.

Knowing who you are is a process; a discovery that gives you a sense of belonging. How does the process start? It starts with daring to chase and opening divine exchanges. Change is a real and positive action. To move unflinching towards your goal will be the secret of your success. The late Princess Diana of Wales was a prisoner of a royal marriage. At times, her loneliness took her to the edge of despair. It was painful to see a delightful candle being snuffed out by the royal system and an empty marriage. Her transformation from victim to victor was a process, in her own words:

*“I have opened up. My life is changing.
This is only the beginning.”*

— **Princess Diana of Wales**

Opening up is the key. It means confronting every emotional mountain you come across. We often bury our emotions, but no emotion buried is dead. It becomes a ghost that will traumatise you for a long time. When we open our eyes to the beauty of life and the treasures of each moment, we will see that the world is a limitless place filled with all kinds of magical things. We will discover the goodness within us. It is my wish that our hearts will always be open to the magic of living and the joy of new discoveries.

Desire to change involves persuasion and determination. It is a habit for many to embrace a particular person as role model, but we often miss the mark in trying to understand or apply his or her formulae to our lives. We may be able to embrace their achievements but not their endurance. Desire for change will bring endurance. Great personalities like Chris Hani, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King did not change things overnight. They started small to reach great heights. Falling does not mean failure; it builds endurance and determination to reach your goal.

Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, once said of Chris Hani: *“The apartheid government painted him as a ‘hawk’, a ‘terrorist leader’, only interested in all-out war, but as Chris Hani showed on his return from exile, he was a soldier who knew when to put down his weapon.*

He travelled the country amid the violence that flared up following the collapse of the Pretoria regime, urging for calm. And who knows what might have happened had history allowed him to participate in the next phase

of the struggle — the challenges posed by trying to pull the country out of decades of oppression.

... The calculated, cold-blooded murder of Chris Hani is not just against a dearly beloved son of the soil. It is a crime against all the people of our country...

A man of passion, of unsurpassed courage, has been cut down in the prime of his life..."

After reading numerous books and watching television, I thought I had a solid knowledge of courage and what it means to be a courageous person. But my life showed me how little I knew about what goes on behind the gates of the heart.

The process of my transformation started with a wake-up call to aim for a higher level of performance; to challenge the stigma of my medical condition. I engaged in activities to interact with more people. I was appointed head boy in junior high school. A new beginning was established when I started sharing with my schoolmates information about my condition, and a few of them began to appreciate my situation.

Anthony Robbins' book, *Awakening the Giant Within*, encouraged me to be more open and talk to friends about my condition so that they could understand and pass on the information. It worked well for me. I began to advocate for children's rights and responsibilities, and more young people became interested. I became a role model to some while others were motivated by my speeches at functions.

*Grill yourself, young mind, put yourself under
the furnace of great change and enjoy
the results of real self-discovery.*

A NEW BEGINNING

When people make fools themselves by laughing at me, my inner self ministers messages of growth and I take control of the situation. Relaxed in my comfort zone, I know the sun will warm my path. With the ugliness of my past behind me, I was ready to turn over a new leaf and discover the greatness in my inner being.

“We will either find a way, or make one.”

— **Hannibal**

Awaken the Giant Within by Anthony Robbins

My quest had been to determine how severe my situation was, but now I realised that I need not understand its severity, only how to deal with it. Now, I am aligning my life to take it to another level.

“It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped.”

— **Anthony Robbins**

I know how difficult it is to start a new way of communicating to surpass a situation that challenges your being.

That was the turnaround of my troubled mind — I now faced the world head-on. I knew I had to tell people about my condition, to share with at least one person a day. Everything in and around my life has to be seen as a building block of a new life.

*“Concerning all acts of initiative and creation,
there is one elementary truth — that the moment
one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves, too.”*

— **Johan Wolfgang Von Goethe-**

Awaken the Giant Within by Anthony Robbins

My goal was to find something I could hold on to so that I can keep going, and hoping that I can be like every other person in spite of Ectodermal Dysplasia. I knew that community service wouldn't be enough for me to have something to hold on to. Actually, community service would only make me want to hide my condition from society even more.

God help me, I was going through a tough time of decision-making. What was I supposed to do when people asked questions I didn't have answers to. Holding the cross of Jesus Christ helped me see there was light at the end of the tunnel. All I needed to do was let God do His part. I didn't have to fight, mourn and groan over what people perceived of me.

I knew I had to move forward, so I decided that I would take each day as it comes. Most people do not understand what I have gone through. But I know I am not alone. There are many people who are struggling to make this a better place and they may be hurting more than me.

I remember meeting a young man who showed me what he had to deal with everyday — a crippled nine-year-old brother. Their parents had died in a car accident, leaving him to care for his brother. He did not

have money for food or clothing, and his only hope was for help from his relatives. I was amazed by this young man. I knew I had a purpose on earth, although I didn't know if it was to be a shoulder for others to lean on or to give a helping hand to other children who may face the challenge of accepting themselves and living life to the fullest.

I come from a family that isn't perfect, so how could I expect society to be? If it was tolerance I wanted, it had to start with me — the words I utter, the way I walk, the way I handle matters to enable empowerment.

I saw a light somewhere ahead, and found a new heart and a field of excellence — to breed new talent and find ways of advocating children's rights and youth empowerment in my environment and in the nation. My heart lives with those who want to give their hearts to me for I am giving mine without any reservation.

I am a young man of virtue, principle and character, and I understand that to live in this world of mockery and deceit, I need to be a person of integrity. With integrity I will have direction, and my ways will be cleaner and more visible, thus giving me a strong sense in everything I do. I know integrity will give me confidence and the heart of a lion, and with it, I will be happier and facing challenges would be easier.

Facing life would mean that I would have to examine myself and identify areas where I may be foolish or careless so that I could save

myself the headache of trying too hard. Reading books and listening to news and talk shows have helped me realise the imperfections of the world and see that all systems, like our lives, contain loopholes.

*I found the light at the end of the tunnel. Strive hard
to see it and do not give up until you find it.*

WEAPONS OF POWER

A new beginning, a new direction ... after understanding the trials I faced, going into the battlefield of the mind, and the struggle for liberation to free my mind of abuse and depression. I have seen God's hand in my life, and the power He gave me. It has left me more at peace with myself and with others.

To receive the weapons of power, you need to change certain things about you, even the place you stay in; you need a room or place that only you have access to.

The following may help you change the way you perceive yourself in your community and society.

Understand your situation

Having struggled to understand why certain things happen to you, you may have realised it is helping you get the picture of why you have been chosen. Consider yourself stronger and more powerful, for those who are weak would not have been chosen; the strong are chosen because the weak are not difficult to deal with.

This helps you to prepare for the real battle ahead — the real challenges of the struggles of life, facing people who want to toss and turn you around because you have a disability. Understand the situation by putting yourself

in it. You need to understand, though, that it is not a battle of power or possession, but a battle to win against all that demoralise us. People don't understand why we are depressed, so understand your situation.

The problem/ situation you face may not be what you think

Understanding that you have a situation means you need to go beyond the troublesome behaviour you are facing or the attitudes of people, but know that these are only manifestations. It is vital that you eliminate bad behaviour, speech or attitudes by getting down to what is really happening.

Building your inner man

My experiences left me wanting to know my character better. I wanted to be more morally right and have integrity. My thoughts and values had to change; I had to know what to say and what not to say or do.

I realised that regardless of what I may be going through, I needed to connect with people and what is happening around me, but I should also set boundaries and limits so as not to let anyone make me think less of myself.

My principles and rules have taken me to the verge of self-discovery — I don't respond to disgusting comments that people may make about me because I am more than what they think of me and I deserve better treatment.

Building this inner person is not done in one day, but you will realise it

works when you communicate with other people, especially at gatherings like conferences, parties and meetings.

I work at sustaining meaningful relationships with my friends, family and relatives. If you think or feel any person is not aligned to your needs, and only give you stress, cut that person out.

Take more control of yourself and your life, and in everything you do, and make sure you live in the reality of your imperfections and that of others.

Understand that others are watching you, so it is vital that you be competent in all the tasks you are given or which you plan to undertake.

You will realise that you will need to look at your abilities.

Owning your life

It is your life and you have to own it, and not let others make you feel they run your show. It is your life; you are behind the steering wheel, and you need to make people know that you own yourself. You need to lead your own life.

We must learn to build on our past, and understand that we may be in situations that we don't understand. But we should also remember that we are not alone. Therefore, putting yourself in another's shoes and making them feel comfortable creates a conducive environment not only for you but for others as well.

Owning your life means helping others realise the next person is just as worthy as them. We are all the same; the only difference is where we come from and the kind of things we want for ourselves.

Let your life teach you the reasons why you need to be an example in all the areas you want to venture into.

“Experiencing change means consistency in many of our values and principles, most of us have seen changes only for a moment and think we cannot make it. Especially when you consider changing what has been a part of you for a long time, it is not only challenging but can also be overwhelming. It is vital that we make changes that will impact our lives forever and not those that will last for a moment and leave us miserable and have no value in our lives at all. When you think it is enough that you want to create a better life for yourself, the need to set standards and principles in your day-to-day living should come first so that you can unleash your potential and even your inner self.”

— ***Awaken the Giant Within You*** (Part One: Unleash the Power on How to Create a Lasting Change) by Anthony Robbins

Getting ready to face a new world and its people requires the attitude of a lion but the heart of a dove so that when you face the challenges in your environment, you will understand that you will have an impact on the quality of life around you.

Creating a legacy

Change involves wanting to be somebody people would want to be like, a person of character and virtue, principles and focus. It is, therefore, good to set high goals and standards for yourself and believe you can overcome all obstacles. Dream big and strive to achieve these dreams, Demand more from yourself, make sure you always set high standards like that of your mentors and role models or even higher. It is vital to think of a night in heaven and what you would wish for before descending to earth.

Outweighing the weaknesses

If you strive to create a legacy, but not practise your dream, you have already kicked the milk jar. The legacy will follow you, but it is you who will make the legacy, so cut down on limiting beliefs, reach down to the soles of your feet, find that inner man of focus and drive for power within you. Change “I cannot” to “I can” and cut out the word “quit”.

Outweighing your weaknesses means working harder to make your dreams come true, and shaping your life to represent your dreams.

Strategising

Committing yourself to a powerful legacy means fighting in a way that will win the battle and wars that will cross your path. Your strategies will be built by your strength which you obtained from understanding that you don't need your weaknesses. Therefore, understanding yourself better

means deciding on the best ways to face challenges and to persevere.

There is a need to understand that all these qualities will depend on your ability to manage your emotions well. When dealing with challenging situations, you have to stand up against the odds. When a misunderstanding is near, avoid brutal ways of solving the matter, remember where you have been, and know it is not necessary to fight over inconsequential things.

Weapons of power take you on a journey of discovering that there is power within every individual. Understand the need to manage your relationships with your partner, friends, family and society. Make sure everyone around you knows you have a sweet spot for him or her, and that you wouldn't dismiss anybody who needs your help. Be some else's picture of perfection — when he/she looks at you, they know you to be a powerful being.

I understood I needed to feel healthy and good about myself, so physical health was one of my concerns when I was on the verge of self-discovery. There is a need to look good, so build your body by taking walks, maybe with your grandmother, friends or your partner. Or get a personal trainer to help you tone your body. It will help you with your body metabolism and help you decide what you can do with your life and not waste time with unimportant things.

Money, too, is a concern because many people are faced with a greater challenge when it comes to managing their finances. It is important to save because saving will teach you the importance of cherishing your assets and preparing for your future.

Possessing the power of success

The power within is a tool all of us have and which we fail to understand. There are so many things that we all try our luck at, including love, and when we fail, we don't try again. Let your past give you a better future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thato Moruti is a 21-year-old student at Limkokwing University of Creative Technology Botswana. He is also a motivator and an active children's rights advocate. He is involved in a number of youth programmes and development projects, including the Ministry of Local Government's magazine for children.

Thato is the founder of the Faculty of Excellence, which is an organisation for young people, and Sheet Size Investments Co., an event management company that promotes the participation of youths in community building.

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*Let people hear your sounding horn;
let your music play louder.*

Faculty of Excellence

(A place of discovery)

The Faculty of Excellence is an independent, registered organisation comprising of young people from different backgrounds who come together in a network of social, personal and financial support. It aims to discover the potential of young people, and also provides peer counselling for young people with troubled minds and problems related to family, drug and alcohol use, sexual abuse and harassment. It helps young people develop their abilities and talents by liaising with companies and relevant authorities that offer opportunities for growth.

The Faculty of Excellence has, since in its establishment, set up an event management company called Sheet Size Investments, which is involved in various events, such as conferences, workshops and other community projects, to encourage the participation of youth. It also established Sheet Size Entertainments, which organises festivals and parties, among other events, as well as raise funds for a resource centre for people with disabilities. It is currently setting up a wedding planning department.

The Faculty of Excellence also publishes a newsletter, which focuses mainly on community development issues, entertainment and disability issues relevant to Botswana community.

For more information, contact:

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Converting lessons in life into inspiration for others

Thato Moruti is a young man who is able to express himself with eloquence. A student of Social Degree in Public Relations at the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology in Botswana, Thato is only 21 years old. Yet in such a short time he has learnt from life's bitter lessons, without succumbing to despair or depression.

He has used his gift for words to condense his experience into a publication that has helped to free his mind. In disciplining himself to the task he has revealed his intensity, his perseverance and his discipline. His intention is to help others overcome their setbacks by using his experiences as an inspiration to climb themselves out of their dilemmas.

Botswana is a nation with talent in abundance. This book is an effort by the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology to provide a channel for talent to grow and to blossom. Creativity is such that it needs constant encouragement to stimulate the passion of those who are talented.

— *published by* —

