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FREDDY Tuma: MY LIFE STORY

My name is Freddy Tumba. I grew up in a family of three siblings including me which makes four. I have two older sisters and a younger brother which makes me the third born of the family. I was born in the year 2006 on the third of January. My height is somewhere around 6'5 or 6'6, I haven't gotten the chance to accurately measure my height due to lack of resources. My whole life I've been a refugee. I cannot remember a time in my life when I wasn't a refugee. Still more I am more than great ful for this opportunity to share the story of my life.

My parents are both from the Democratic Republic of Congo but due to insecurity they fled to South Africa where they gave birth to all of us. Life was really hard and always has been. My father would try all he could to feed the family despite all the hardships.

Mom as well did the same. The moment things changed was when the xenophobia started and the country thugs and citizens would attack my dad while at work. All the stress, injuries and panic were the factors which led to stroke. My dad lay in the hospital bed, having no strength seeing us helpless just kept on praying for our safety and that God would provide for us. That's the moment mom began hustling and trying to make a living out of her hair braiding skills. Sadly, dad got paralyzed and he wasn't able to work anymore. This put a heavy responsibility on mom. I lived a not getting what you want kind of life and it gets really frustrating sometimes. We all went to school and grasped the knowledge and language that we could despite having gaps in our education. Our parents tried their very best to keep us educated. A life changing opportunity for us was when my dad met the missionaries of the church of Jesus Christ of latter day saints. At first he was kind of hesitant but through prayer, pondering and concentration God revealed the healing truth unto him. He got converted and made his efforts to get us baptized. I remember the days he would sit down with us and teach us the gospel, those are the days that when I remember my eyes get filled with tears of joy.

The biggest impact on our lives was the gospel of Jesus Christ, it made us feel peace even through our suffering, it made us feel joy even through our afflictions. I woke up one day, if I can remember I was about nine years old and heard my parents talking about leaving the country. I had no idea as an infant, I thought it would be all about fun and exploring new things and places but unfortunately it wasn't. They had planned for us to travel to the Malawi refugee camp. At first it was really hard to agree with the fact that we had to leave a place we lived in as kids to go somewhere we never even thought existed but we just had to accept the bitter reality. It was in the year 2016 when we began packing our stuff to leave for Malawi. Things didn't go as expected. I remember some traumatizing events during the journey which make me cry till this day. Dad's mental health was not okay as a result of the stroke and sicknesses he had. I would watch sadly how mom and dad argued through out the journey, one of the



most terrifying scenes a child can witness. We spent almost a week on the road as we traveled by bus.

After a long and tiresome journey we finally arrived in the Malawi refugee camp. The place looked very different from how it was explained to us, absolutely not the kind of place one would like to live in. It was awful. The dust, the smell and climate was really



bad. Our parents had to comfort us with lies that after five days we would leave and go somewhere else better but things didn't turn out that way. That was the beginning of a life I've never expected. We began to experience the hatred and criticism from long stayed refugees, so much provocation. The main reason for all that is because we are members of the church of Jesus Christ of latter day saints and most people look at us as magicians or witches saying our church is wealthy and we make sacrifices to earn money. The feeling of insecurity began to flow within our

minds, for the first

From all I remember they were the best. Those were the times we really needed help and they were there for us. We would watch emotionally how elder Rose would carry dad from the car despite his old age, all the way to the house and lay him in bed. Dad loved elder Rose so much and wished that he was in a better condition to spend more time with him. The more we kept taking dad to the hospital was the more he got sick, they kept giving him only pain killers instead of helping with the right medicines. They said they had no idea about what was going on with him. The Rose couple assisted us a lot since we couldn't afford a private hospital. Dad's wish was to see his children grow up and live a better life. I remember he would call me and tell "Freddy, I brought you and the family here so you can immigrate to the US or whatever country it may be so that you can live a better life. Remember no matter what you may go through, all is well, all is well. Remember that God loves you and he has a plan for you, be patient through afflictions and I promise you that as you have chosen to follow Jesus Christ and keep his commandments and live by the gospel, God will lead you to the promised land. Keep the commandments and pray always, as long as you are in this church God will provide no matter what". I didn't really understand that he was saying his last goodbyes.

The Roses mission had also ended and before they left we had a get together. We prayed we sang hymns and shared our testimonies. I truly enjoyed that day. Not long after they had left dad's condition got even worse. There were times he couldn't even

eat, talk or see, he couldn't even walk. All he could say is my children it's me, it's me here I am. We as kids would stay by his side the whole day watching his heart beat violently as if he was about to die at the spot. On a certain day he called me, I was surprised that he was able to speak properly at that time. He said "Freddy come and play the Joseph Smith history movie I wanna watch it". We had a laptop we carried from south Africa. I put the disc into the laptop and played the movie, he was lying on the bed so I adjusted it so he could watch properly. That was his favorite movie, ours too. After some minutes I went to check on him and found him asleep, the movie still playing. Tears filled my eyes as I switched off the machine and put it away. He went through a lot, so much pain, sometimes he would ask me for a knife so that he could just end his life by will.

The night of that same day was kind of cold. Mom was sitting beside dad in the room while we played and danced out side unaware of what was about to happen. All of a sudden we heard mom say "guys come watch over your father, I'm going to look for help". Dad's blood pressure had gone so low, he had no blood in his body any more. Mom and the doctor arrived in a hurry, tests were made and a needle was inserted into dad's finger but no blood came out. They quickly called a neighbor who had a car and that same night they rushed to the hospital. In the morning we were having fun and dancing as usual while our parents were at the hospital. It was in the evening when a friend of Jessica my older sister visited and found us eating. At first he tried all his best to distract us but eventually he said with a sad but deep voice "Jessica, your dad is dead". We all burst into tears not believing the terrible news. A moment later we heard mom coming while crying with other people comforting her. It was confirmed, the head of the house was gone.

The same church supported with the funeral and burial. We sang hymns and we were encouraged to be happy and trust in God that one day we will meet again. People in the area began to mock and criticize us saying that we are the ones who killed dad as a sacrifice for wealth, very painful to hear.

The refugee camp is a very horrible place, there's killings, jealousy and secret combinations. The suffering became intense. Drawing water is one of the hardest things to do. By pumping the borehole the body gets hurt and tired and after that we had to carry more than a 120 litres of water all the way home, how tiresome. It wasn't just a short process, the borehole gets filled with a lot of refugees who all need water and through arguments and resistance fights occur. We try our very best not to get into any fight. After the passing of dad mom decided to get married again. A random looking guy proposed to her and all of a sudden they hooked up. We told mom to take things slowly but to our surprise, he moved in with us. This was so frustrating. At first he showed a good personality trying to distract us from who he really was. His presence in the house was nothing but a disaster. For no reason he would try to lay hands on my sisters and try to hurt them. At the time I was really young and there was nothing I could do about it. I know for sure, we all know that if he hadn't been a part of our family our lives would have been much better.[]

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My sisters ran away from home as a result of the abuse and trouble the man was causing. We struggled a lot, sometimes we would wake up and not know where to find food or when we would eat starving for hours and for days. Even though, the man would take things from the house including mom's clothes and sell them in exchange for weed and alcohol. I was under eighteen when he began treating Jacob and I badly and forced us to look for a job so he could get all the money and enjoy foolishly with it. We were threatened that we would be killed or hurt by him. He always walked with sharp objects in his pockets or hands, very dangerous person. Mom saw things went too far and decided to make a step to our freedom. In unity we prayed and fasted for God to help us. I had all the strength to take the man down but instead of fighting I and Jacob left home and went to an old unfinished house with no lights nor roof and began staying there. It was cold at night, dark, scary and uncomfortable. The door had no knob nor way to get locked so we used water containers and heavy objects to secure it while we slept. I remember moments where we had no soap and lotion, not even water to take a bath. Looking at my starving young brother caused me to cry secretly because I never wanted him to see me cry, my responsibility was to strengthen him through out our afflictions. No breakfast, no lunch and no supper, surviving only on water and sugar. We got ill but had no means to buy medicines. I was going through a lot of stress and anxiety that I couldn't even fall asleep. I've been ill for months just because I had no way to get medicines. I even felt embarrassed to walk around because I had no clothes or shoes that looked presentable relying on a pair of slippers for a full year. Everyone laughed at us saying we are orphans and there's nothing left for us on this earth. We never heeded the mockery instead we kept the faith. Us being filled with God's love shielded us from life's storms and made the happy moments happier.

There's nothing compared to they joy and peace our Savior Jesus Christ offers us. The world is so dark and full of evil.

I woke up one day having received inspiration from the Holy spirit and told mom that she should pack her things and find a way to escape the evil man. Jacob and I were ready despite not knowing how we would afford to move from the refugee camp to the city Lilongwe. Our trust in God was really strong and no one could shake it. Miraculously mom found a way one morning and told us to be ready with our stuff. Eventually we escaped. I tried my best to make some money through selling old furniture, that's what payed our transport. Luckily one of our church members was residing in Lilongwe and they welcomed us but with condition that we pay rent and buy our own food. The moment we felt like giving up was the moment that God sent elder Jack to our rescue. His assistance was of great worth that every time I remember I weep tears of joy.

Watching mom sick in bed and having nothing to do about it was so painful and frustrating. She tried her best to work but all of a sudden to our surprise she fell ill. She

suffered from sugar problems and kidney infection. Those were the effects of eating late and starvation. No money to plan a healthy diet.

I enjoyed talking to elder Jack on the phone, he is such an enthusiastic person. Every time I think of him I feel happy and laugh. Those days he would call and check up on us, assist us and encourage us. We thought he was joking when he said he would find sponsors for us. It felt like a dream when he said " I have found people, Ken Turner, who are interested in you and your family. They are willing to help you immigrate to the US". After being introduced to our sponsors, our lives changed. From darkness and starvation to light and hope. These good and loving elderly people have been so good to us, because of there efforts we are able to get back in school, eat better, sleep better and live better. I've never seen such love and kindness in any one like what I see in them, the Lord's faith

We still live under insecurity because our mom's ex husband keeps on disturbing us even though they have divorced. I don't even sleep at night just so I can look out for the family. Some times he would jump over the fence late at night and bash the windows with bricks. On a certain night he jumped over the fence and tried attacking mom. As soon as she saw him she scam and called my name. As I came rushing I found that he had already escaped. Mom said he had a machet in his hand. He is so annoying and keeps sending threatening messages to us saying that he will pop out of nowhere and attack mom. He insists that Jacob and I are the reason he is miserable and can't be with mom anymore. His level of hatred and jealousy has exceeded badly.

Still more we always pray for divine protection and direction from God.

I share my testimony that God lives and loves us that He sent His only begotten son Jesus Christ to be a sacrifice for sin. I know that Jesus Christ lives and His love for us is beyond eternity. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. He has broken the bands of death and has victory over the grave. I know that through faith, prayer and keeping the commandments God will bless us abundantly, not just temporally but spiritually as well. I say all these things in the mighty name of our Lord and Savior even Jesus Christ, Amen.

FREDDY Tuma: MY LIFE OF BASKETBALL

Below is a brief explanation of how I started playing basketball.

I was thirteen when I began watching videos of Michael Jordan and Lebron James on a friend's computer. The way they played looked so good and interesting I felt that I should try it for myself. My older sister Jessica had a friend who was a basketball coach. As he visited us we would spend time talking about sports and fun things. He told me one day that I and my younger brother should visit the basketball ball court and start learning. He said "this sport is the best sport you can learn and it will help you one day". I was so willing to learn. The first day I learnt how to crossover and bounce the ball. In a week I mastered the shooting technique and layups.

I began to love the game so much it felt as if it were a part of me. Some days I felt shy to play because older players would criticize me. I stopped playing for a year or so until a certain team called me. They said I was a great player but I didn't realize it. Here in the refugee camp we have no resources for training and no coaches as well. Most of the things I can do I learnt them by myself.

As I got better I felt that I could get great opportunities. My dream is to play in the NBA. It's a scary dream that most people doubt but through God it is possible. I really want to play at a professional level. This will be a blessing to me and my family. I'm really willing to help my mom and my siblings and see them living a better life. All my goals and dreams are not selfish but for my benefit and my family as well. I'm willing to give the game all I can.

FREDDY Tuma: MY DREAMS OF THE FUTURE

I always dream of living a life where I'm no longer considered as a refugee. I always see myself amongst the greatest players. I strongly believe that through hard work and faith in God I can live the dream I always wished for. What I feel can happen if I immigrate to the US is me getting the opportunities I've never had and taking them with full responsibility. I've seen it a lot, how people start from zero and become successful in the end. I believe it will happen to me too.

Within ten years from now I see myself playing professionally and making a living out of basketball. I see my family in a good condition. I also see myself happily with a family of my own which I will build.

One of my greatest wishes is to help those in need. To help the society and all I can. I am willing to do this because I know how it feels to suffer, to be desperate for help and to starve for days. Through my tough experiences I've learnt how to have sympathy for others.