



Veronica Wellene Ann Kroukamp (57)

“They shot him in front of his gate”

I grew up in three different areas. I was born in Peninsula Hospital Cape Town, but I grew up between my two grannies and my mother and father. During my first year my mother and father stayed by his parents, then they moved to my mother’s parents. His parents stayed in Retreat and my mother’s parents stayed in Grassy Park. From my third until my seventh we lived in Grassy Park. We lived on the premises of the Calvinist church where my father was a caretaker. My mother had her own business as a flower seller in Claremont.

From what I can remember, up till 7 years of age I had a wonderful childhood life. At the age of 7 my mother and father got separated. My father fell in love with another woman. My mother, at the night he left, she had three nervous breakdowns. She undressed and walked at the cemetery. Her youngest brother went to fetch her. For four months she couldn’t think clearly, my grandmother took charge of me. My life completely changed.

I stayed with my mother until the age of sixteen. I had to be her mother. I had to care for her. At 13 years of age I left school and went to work for Muslim people to pay our rent and food. As we moved from my grannies house we went to stay at a farm in Ottery, on Kliproad. There we lived in a stable. When the farm had no more animals the farmer hired the stables out like houses. When we moved there my mother rented a big wagon where she put all our furniture and clothes on. We had beautiful furniture, but the people on that farm was very jealous of my mother, because they didn’t know the class family we came off. I used to go to school in the morning and when I came back I saw they hit my mother and they took all her furniture. They overpowered her to sell it to them for nothing.

Another day, when my mother cooked food, the children of the farm came and threw my mother’s food out and threw sand in the pots. My mother was a very pretty woman and very intelligent, but after the breakdowns she was not herself anymore. Until I turned 15 we stayed there. Then one morning she was feeling very well, she stood up and said she is going to sell flowers again. She went to a farm in Lotus River to pick some lilies and yellow and blue flowers. She brought it back and washed it off underneath the tap and then the landlord lady called six ladies to hit my mother for nothing. They undressed my mother and the one lady took a pole with a needle in and hit my mother on the head and she put the hosepipe and made my mother wet. And then another cousin of my mother that stayed on another part of the farm called the police. But when the police came, they did not take the ladies, they took my mother. The landlady made a charge against my mother and told a whole lot of lies. They took my mother to

Grassy Park police station and she had to walk home from there. She did not have time to go and sell the flowers.

“He wanted to be the first one, for all the girls”

I experienced a lot of violence as a child. This guy who was the eldest at the farm, he hit us and also abused all the girls. That's when I was 13. He wanted to be the first one; he was like a father for all the girls. I wasn't happy with it but I didn't want to tell my mother because she wouldn't be able to do anything about it. I also smoked and experimented with dagga. If you don't do it you can't be friends with them [the older kids] and they hit you all the time. I didn't do it all the time and I didn't make it a habit. But I smoked cigarettes every day. Then this guy formed a little gang and we as girls had to carry the knives. Then they go fight with the other gang and if we don't want to carry their stuff they hit us. Then I decided I'd rather work for my mother's people, so I was out of that farm. And that's how my life went.

When I was 16 my mother's brother died. He just came out of jail and then he fell off a ladder. After her brother died we spend some time with his wife. One Saturday night some of my friends asked me to go with them to a dance. I said yes, but then my mother wouldn't let me go. She had been drinking and said no. Then I tell lies and I said to her no we are not going to the dance; we are just going to the shop. Then we were just in the road. Then I heard her scream. The next minute I just heard a bump. But none of us saw a car, we didn't see anything, it was dark. We walked two after the other in pairs. I saw my mother just roll under the car's wheels. I ran and I saw my mother lying there and I cried. None of us expected that to happen. And then I immediately ran from there to my grandmother in Fifth Avenue. She shouted at me that I must run back to my mother. The ambulance was coming. I ran back. I saw them loading my mother in but they said I can't go with them because I'm too young. Then I went to stay with the neighbours. And the old lady, auntie Annie, she went with me the next morning to Victoria Hospital to see if my mother is still alive. She was unconscious. They treated her in the hospital, but she was paralyzed, she could only use her one arm.

My mother only lived for eight months after the accident. The only time that my mother and I were separated from each other was after the accident. I wasn't allowed to go and visit my mother at the hospital because I moved to my father. My grandmother believed in *sangoma* and said that my father did something to my mother, which was not true. I stayed by my father. Then one day I came back to see my mother, I was working with my father's sister at a bakery. There I bought two packets of biscuits, a can of guava juice and a big packet of peanuts and raisins. I bought the same for my sister and delivered it. I took my mother's packet to my grandmother. My grandfather still told me please don't go in by your grandmother, go straight into your mother's room. But I thought I must have that respect, I must first greet my grandmother. As she opened the door she asked me: "What are you doing here?". She gave me a smack. "You are the same as your father; your mother is now already cripple and you are not allowed to see her. Your father is sending you now with this stuff to kill your mother", she told me. I said no, as you can see it's still sealed, the products. But she put me right out by the door, my grandfather cried.

If you put your feet here again I will have you locked up, she said. That was the last time that I was there. I was so heartbroken. I was crying for two weeks.

From there my life was never the same. I started to get very rebellious. Because of all what happened. That was a drunken driver. But even the police didn't want to take my statement. My mother's family had all written me off at that time. They did not want to know the truth, still up till today they are blaming me for my mother's death. One of her sisters would say that I would see how bad things would turn out for me and that I would not become anyone in life.

“He told me I must not look for him”

I married when I was 19. I got pregnant at 18. I loved him. Also, considering the circumstances of my life, I felt this is the only thing that is going to give me pleasure, to get a boyfriend and marry. The saddest part is that when I got pregnant, his parents said that it wasn't his child. Just a month before we were going to get married they said it wasn't his child. In hospital I had so much complications. His parents didn't allow him to marry me but he came to fetch me straight from the hospital when I gave birth. He was very brave to come there and stand by me.

My first five or six years of marriage was very good. My husband worked and he built us a house in Retreat. Then my husband became very abusive. He went to work one day and he told me that morning - he was very furious - that he did not want me to go to church such a lot. The night before he had a fight with me and we separated that night. The next morning he told me he was going to leave me with the four children and I must not look for him. The Friday morning the hospital calls me; I must come and fetch him. A car knocked him over, he got a head injury. He was completely off, when I saw him I just laughed. They asked my why do I laugh. I said I laugh because he said I must not look for him, I must not look after him and look how he is looking now. After that, he was never the same. He wasn't committed to his job after the accident. So he got sacked. Then I had to go for counseling with my two children because he got aggressive and so the doctor explained me how my husband will be from now on, because of the accident. He will always see me as the enemy. For a few years it was like that but then they started giving him injections and tablets. Then my money problems stopped because we got a disability grand. We rise above our circumstances; we don't let ourselves go down.

“I don't feel that you must fight back”

It's like there has been violence during my whole life... My son, they shot him in front of his gate. A few months ago in March, he and his neighbour had differences and then their whole family attacked him and his wife and his mother in law. I said to him, they hurt you badly, but of my mind and heart I don't feel that you must fight back, you must rather lay a case against them. Then his neighbour, she keeps interfering with him. But I tell him to not fight with the people, because he's got a previous record, he's an ex-gangster. He was now ten years out of this gangsterism. For four years he was in with the Bostons, when the two brother leaders of the

Boston died he stopped and got married to his wife. He stayed with me for a year. None of the gangsters worried with him. But now recently the neighbours keep on. There were always people as witnesses to say that these people started first. The week before he was shot one of the neighbour's sisters had an argument with him again and she told him she will get someone to kill him.

The argument with my son was because he helped me with the soup kitchen. Whatever is left over from my soup kitchen I used to give it to him and he issues it out there, in his neighbourhood. Now this neighbour, whatever my son does, they want to do the same. He had a grocery shop, then they also do it. There was always that jealousy over him. He tried everything to keep his family happy. The community is still very sad about what happened to him, most of them are lost without him, he was the only one who cared for them there at the back section of Village Heights. Their children are going to be hungry now. I'm now there with them, I opened a craft and prayer meeting at his house.

It was jealousy of the neighbours. It happens a lot in the community. What you do, the next person wants to do also and they will do anything to bring you down. They don't want you to get out of your position; they are always blocking you. But like my son he was a person that nobody can block him, it's like myself, we break through, we don't consider people's nasty things. For a few years now he build up a nice relationship with the community there at the back. They are very sorry and they feel lost, because their children's piece of bread was taken out of their moth.

I want to see the community grow and build their self-esteem up, because the people are unemployed and they believe they must just live with handouts. I show them how you can get out of that position, there is so many courses that they can take part of. What I give them is to make something with their hands and sell it and put bread on their table. I didn't go far in school but I went to adult education and I have a driving license, my Women Aglow certificate as a leader, I did English classes, cooking classes and home based care. I did a lot. I do not sit still.

Veronica Kroukamp and her friend Rose Sevil organize a soup kitchen and art & craft and prayer group meetings at Montague Village. Veronica also participates in the 'Women Aglow' women's support group. She is a nurse at night.