

It is tough! It is hard! But, hold on dear :)

A boy came up to me the other day and told me with tears that his mom is in an illicit relationship with another man who is not his father (even though the father is staying at home with them). He is shocked and choked.

A 14 year old girl was in tears while she told me how her dad gets drunk and beats up her and her brother every night. She wanted to kill herself, so the pain would stop.

My heart pains when I hear these stories. I do cry deep inside. But let me briefly share with you from my life.

Did I have questions like these when I grew up? Oh yes, certainly.

Did it hurt? Oh yes, very much.

Was I frustrated and wanted an escape route? Oh yeah, definitely!

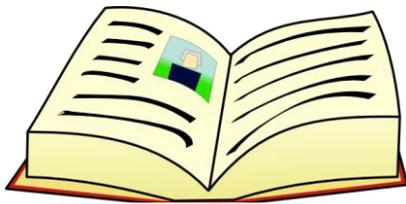
There were nights through which I would clinch the window and wait for dawn. I cried and cried and cried. I wanted all these struggles to just go away. But there was no magic that could make it happen.

I learnt an important lesson. **I have to learn to face the storm and eagerly look around to see God take me through the storm.** We always try to escape or bypass the storm. But, that's not the way to get through it. Storms are to be faced head on. They make us stronger. Oh yeah, it's definitely easier said than done. It is tough. Yes, it is! It is, most certainly.

Another lesson that dawned on me as I slowly and steadily became stronger is that, this is my life. I cannot allow anyone else to spoil it. I need to take charge. **I cannot play around or fool around. I cannot afford to make those wrong choices. I am not like my other friends who can goof around. No. My life is very precious and I need to focus and take control.**

Let me bring you a few more tips from my past.

As I am writing this morning, I find myself getting stuck in so many places as I recall those horrible, terrible nights and days. But then I look around and say, "Oh, those days are over". This is now my time to reach out and rescue. So, I pray also that these experiences will help you to step out and reach out :)



A Story to SHARE: Waking up in the morning was very difficult for me. But just the thought that I could get out of my house would pep me up. So, the first thing any day I would get up and brush my teeth, outside the house. On most days I had to brush with charcoal powder or the brick powder. Water would have to be pulled from the well close by or would be pumped up with a public hand pump. Ah! there were so many days, that were very difficult for me. I would spend hours brushing and often get lost in my personal world of fantasy and dream.

We have lived in places where different rent houses in the same block would use the common toilet nearby. We would go and place our buckets of water in line and wait for our turn. There were many mornings when I would sit inside the Indian toilet (It's just a hole in the ground) and doze off until someone came knocking and shouting. My step mom would always be tensed in the mornings. For her, the challenge was to finish the chores for the day and get the both of us out of the house before any of the previous night's left over fight kicked in. You guessed it right!

Almost every morning, my step mom and I would sneak out of the house while my father was still sleeping. There were a few unfortunate mornings in between when he would wake up and then the fight would kick in. I remember pitying my step mom. She would scream, begging him not to beat on her face. Why? Well, if you get beaten on the face, it swells up real quick. Since

my stepmom was a teacher, she had to face her students and then it would be embarrassing to stand before the primary kids as she taught.

As for me, I was scared to death. Sometimes, blood would splatter over my white shirt. I would then immediately try to rub it out, very often with my saliva, so I could rush off to school and no one would notice. Most of the days, I would somehow race out of the house grabbing my school bag (Nope, I never waited to check if the books were taken according to that days' time table).

Breakfast time was always the 'gulp something' kind of time. My step mom would soak old rotis in milk or water and roll them into balls and give me. I need to gulp in five balls of old roti. Was that enough? Not at all! Did I like the taste? You see, the truth is that until a certain point in my life I never thought much about taste. Well, once the breakfast or the gulping routine was done, my step mom and I would make this walk to school. We always walked to school. No school bus or school van. No money for that. The walk would take different duration at times 15 minutes, other times 20 minutes. Then there was a house that we lived in (when I was 9 years old) and we had to walk for 45 minutes to reach the school. Carrying all those books and walking was hard. But, was I happy as long as I could stay out of the house.

The paths were long and muddy and my shoes would get dirty. But, we could not afford to buy shoe polish. So, what did I do to keep my shoes clean? For black shoes, I used to cut onions to polish my shoes. It smells a little, but it gives a good shine. Try it. For white shoes, my step mom would bring home broken white chinks and I would soak it in water and make a paste of chalk lime and apply on the shoes. It works perfectly. My shorts and shirts were old and torn most of the time. My step mom would use patches to cover the holes. Those days, it could fool one for a new fashion. Today I am amused to see jeans with patches and tear sell for a fortune. Amuse me it would, for I wore that fashion way back in life (LoL). I had never worn jeans until I was 23 yrs old. I must admit, initially I found jeans extremely uncomfortable, but today I love them. They are almost a staple.

Many a time I would sit under street lights or open places in front of houses by the street and study. Truthfully though, I loved dreaming more than studying. So, I dreamed, a lot. Many a times I played around with street dogs. I kissed them, liked them as they liked me (Yuk! I know, but please understand that I loved these animals so, so, so, so, much). The dogs were my deep connection. May be they had rabbi or some other infection, but thank God nothing happened to me. Well, late into the night I would have played and hardly studied, and as the night went on, the same old fight story would unfold at my home with screams and beatings and arguments.

So, what are some of the right things I did? What are some of the things I could have done differently? Oh, of the latter there were many, many. I could have done a lot of things differently and right. Today, in retrospect I can evaluate and learn. But there were some things even then that I did right, although with gritted teeth and an unwilling heart. What were those?

1. I did not decide to commit suicide. (Although I tried it two times later in life). Today I see so many teens and kids immediately making such foolish decisions. **HOLD ON!**

2. I desperately hoped and hoped and hoped that someday things will change. That hope did help me see God turn things around in my life. **HOLD ON!**

3. I had an inherent faith in God. I did not understand how and why. But I knew, He was there and He was watching over me. **HOLD ON!**

4. There were few people here and there with whom I shared my life and received counsel and help. There were some shoulders to lean on. **HOLD ON!**

5. I just went through tough days. Night after night after night, I just kept moving mechanically. **HOLD ON!**

6. I found joy in little, little things around me. I did not sit there waiting for something big to lift me up. No. I learnt to find joy in little things, got entertained in little things. This was extremely helpful. **HOLD ON!**

7. I would allow myself to get excited, seeing a small open door. I would walk through it right away and grab the opportunity. I hardly ever thought twice. I did not sit there saying, 'I can't', but saw it as an avenue to give myself some freedom. **HOLD ON!**

8. I spent time thinking and dreaming about a good future. I don't know if this was right or wrong. But these dreams allowed faith to rise up inside me. I had no clue what was going to happen. Yes, there were times I would brood, spend hours thinking about the worst that could happen, but then I loved the times when I would imagine all the good things happening (I never had a real belief that it would all come to pass. But, that did not stop me from dreaming). But interestingly, that very dreaming of future life and hope, stirred up faith inside me. **HOLD ON!**

9. I spent hours trying to understand the character of deeper life. The character of God. True characters of how my life needs to be. True character of depth that I saw around me and I was immediately drawn towards it. **HOLD ON AND LEARN!**

Hey, dear friend. Hold on! Hold on! Great days are ahead of us! Don't lose hope, just yet. I made this quote a few days ago, which came out of another great quote :)

“Have faith to DREAM BIG. Have courage and security to START SMALL. Be wise to DIG DEEP”

