

Itumeleng

My name is Itumeleng. I am a girl of 17 years.

I come from the district of Thaba Tseka, high in the mountains.

I have four brothers, two are younger and two are older. I also have two younger sisters. I used to live with them and my grandparents in a small hut on the side of a big mountain. Both my parents have passed away.

I used to wake up at 5am everyday and collect water for the family. I would then collect firewood and make a fire and prepare the food for my family. My grandmother and grandfather are very old and they cannot help me.

I would then help my younger brothers and sisters to get ready for school. Sometimes there was not enough food and I had to send them off without any breakfast. Luckily they will receive food at lunch and so will not go hungry all day.

My older brothers work as herd boys but they do not make very much money. I know that they also want to go to school.

I used to be a student at Paray High School. My principal said I was very smart and so she allowed me to study in the hope that I would have a sponsor who would pay my school fees. I really wanted to study but I could not do my homework in the evenings and so I was failing.

When I came home from school each day I had to do all the washing and cooking for my family. By the time I could study there was no light. My grandmother said I could not use the candles to study as we did not have enough money to buy more. This made me very sad because my dream is to finish high school and attend the nursing school in my district.

One day my brother came home with one of his friends. His friend said I was very pretty and he wanted to marry me. When we were alone he tried to kiss me. I said I did not want to be married but that I wanted to become a nurse. At first I did not let him kiss me but he kept telling me how much he liked me. He said that if I married him that he would take care of me and that he would pay for my school fees. He was nice to me and so I thought about what he said.

When I returned to the hut and looked at my four brothers and sisters who were already asleep on the floor of our hut I realised that there would be no way that they could attend high school unless I worked to pay for their fees.

I decided to marry Thabiso so that I could get a job and care for my brothers and sisters.

I have been married now for one year. I had a baby two months ago and I think that I may be pregnant again. Thabiso did not keep his promise he did not pay my school fees because he said he did not have enough money. I thought my life would be better after I got married but now I must care for my husband and my baby. My baby is very sick all the time but there is no money for a doctor.

I think about my brothers and sisters. My younger sister is now taking care of the family. She can no longer attend school as there is too much work and no one to pay the school fees. She is 13 year old.