



MARTHA ZURICH

PART 1 – MY JOURNEY FROM SURVIVING TO LIVING AGAIN

A Speech for Yokhuselo Haven AGM

Good afternoon everyone,

To the board members, management, staff, volunteers, supporters, donors, and every woman here today, thank you for giving me the opportunity to stand before you.
It is truly an honour.

Standing here today is something I never imagined would be possible. There was a time when I had completely lost my voice. There was a time when I believed I had nothing left to offer the world. Today I stand before you not because my journey has been easy, but because people believed in me when I no longer believed in myself.

Today, I stand before you because of The Haven.

Before I tell you about the Haven, I want to tell you a little about myself.

Like so many women, I found myself trapped in a relationship that slowly stole pieces of who I was. It didn't happen overnight. Abuse rarely does.

It begins quietly.

It begins with words.

With criticism.

With control disguised as love.

With isolation disguised as protection.

With manipulation disguised as concern.

Little by little, your confidence disappears.

Your self-worth disappears.

Your independence disappears.

And before you know it, you no longer recognise the person staring back at you in the mirror. Many people ask, "Why didn't you just leave?"

If only it were that simple.

Leaving an abusive relationship is one of the hardest things a person can ever do.

Especially when the abuse is emotional, psychological, physical, sexual and financial.

The bruises people can't see are often the deepest.

Narcissistic abuse is especially confusing because the person hurting you can also be the same person who tells you they love you.

One day they make you feel like you're the most important person in the world.
The next day they make you believe you're worthless.
They manipulate your reality.
They make you question your memory.
They blame you for their behaviour.
Eventually you begin apologising for things that were never your fault.
You begin walking on eggshells.
You become afraid to speak.
Afraid to laugh.
Afraid to make mistakes.
Afraid to simply be yourself.

The hardest part is that many victims don't even realise they are being abused.

Because emotional abuse doesn't always leave visible scars.
But it leaves invisible wounds that take years to heal.

Looking back now, I realise there were so many warning signs.

The constant criticism.
The need to control everything.
Being isolated from family and friends.
Never feeling good enough.
Having every decision questioned.
Being made to feel guilty for having emotions.
Being told that everything was somehow my fault.
Being made to doubt my own reality.
Those are not signs of love.
Those are signs of control.
Love does not humiliate.
Love does not manipulate.
Love does not make you afraid.
Love does not destroy your spirit.

For anyone sitting here today who may recognise those signs in your own life, I want you to hear this with all your heart:

You are not weak.
You are not crazy.
You are not the problem.
You deserve kindness.

You deserve respect.
You deserve peace.
And most importantly...
You deserve to be safe.

The day I finally reached out for help was one of the hardest days of my life.

But it was also the bravest.
Sometimes courage doesn't look like fighting.
Sometimes courage looks like asking someone to help you.
Sometimes courage looks like walking through the doors of a place you've never been before,
hoping someone will understand.

For me...

That place was The Haven.

I arrived carrying fear.
Shame.
Confusion.
Exhaustion.
I didn't know what my future would look like.
I only knew I couldn't continue living the way I had been.
And from the very first moment...
The Haven welcomed me.
Not with judgement.
Not with questions about why I stayed.
But with kindness.
With compassion.
With dignity.
For the first time in a very long time...
I felt safe.

PART 2 – THE HAVEN GAVE ME HOPE AGAIN

As the days turned into weeks, something remarkable began to happen.
Very slowly, and sometimes without me even realising it, I began to heal.
Healing doesn't happen overnight.
There were days when I cried.
There were days when I questioned whether I would ever feel like myself again.
There were days when I felt overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty.

But every single day, someone at the Haven reminded me that I was stronger than I believed.
The Haven didn't simply provide me with a safe place to stay.
They gave me something far more valuable.
They gave me hope.
They gave me dignity.
They gave me the opportunity to discover who I was again.

One of the things that made such a difference in my healing journey was the counselling and the group sessions.
Each week we were encouraged to write down our thoughts and feelings. Sometimes we were asked questions that helped us reflect on our experiences, our emotions, and the challenges we had faced during the week.

At first, it wasn't easy.
Putting painful feelings onto paper meant facing emotions I had tried so hard to hide.
But slowly, I realised something.
Every time I wrote, I became a little stronger.
Every time I shared my story, I became a little lighter.
Every time someone listened without judging me, another piece of my heart began to heal.
Those sessions taught me that healing is not about pretending the pain never happened.
Healing is learning that the pain no longer controls your future.

The Haven also reminded us that life doesn't end because we've experienced abuse.
Life can begin again.

We participated in crafts, activities and life-skills programmes that helped rebuild our confidence.
Some days we created something beautiful with our hands.
Other days we learned practical skills that would help us become independent again.
We cooked together.
We cleaned together.
We laughed together.
And sometimes, without even realising it, we were rebuilding our lives together.
Those moments may seem small to someone looking in from the outside.
But to a woman who has been told for years that she is worthless, every small success becomes a reminder that she is capable.
Every accomplishment whisper, "You can do this."
Every encouraging word becomes another brick in rebuilding a life that abuse tried to destroy.
The Haven never treated us as victims.
They treated us as women with value.
Women with potential.
Women who deserved another chance.

That made all the difference.

One of the greatest gifts The Haven gave me wasn't just helping me survive.
They helped me believe that I could truly live again.
As many of you know, I wasn't alone on this journey.

My precious daughter, Zara, came with me.
As a mother, one of my greatest worries was how this experience would affect her.
Children may not always understand what is happening around them, but they feel everything.
They feel fear.
They feel tension.
They feel sadness.
And every mother wants nothing more than to know her child is safe.
The Haven didn't only care for me.
They embraced Zara with so much love.
They gave her a safe place to play.
A place where she could simply be a little girl again.
Where laughter replaced fear.
Where smiles replaced tears.
Where childhood was protected.
Watching her smile again gave me hope that we were both healing.
She became everyone's little princess.
She was loved so deeply by the staff, volunteers and the women staying there.

One of the greatest honours I will carry in my heart forever is that the boutique where women and children could receive clothing was named **Zara's Boutique** in her honour.
That gesture may seem simple to some people.
But to me, it spoke volumes.
It reminded me that every child matters.
Every woman matters.
Every life matters.
It reminded me that love has an incredible way of restoring what pain tries to steal.
There are moments in life that you never forget.
That will always be one of mine.

And then there is someone I simply cannot speak about The Haven without mentioning.
Rochelle.
I don't think words can fully express my gratitude.
Rochelle wasn't just a manager.
She was a steady hand during the storms that so many of us were facing.
She led with compassion.

She listened with patience.
She encouraged us when we couldn't encourage ourselves.
She celebrated every small victory with us and gently supported us through every setback.
She made every woman who walked through those doors feel seen, heard and valued.
Rochelle, thank you for believing in women who had forgotten how to believe in themselves.
Thank you for showing kindness when we needed it most.
Thank you for reminding us that our past does not define our future.
Your work changes lives.
And I know I speak not only for myself, but for many women whose lives have been touched by your kindness, when I say: thank you from the bottom of my heart.
As time went on, The Haven helped me do something that once felt impossible.

They helped me take the next steps toward independence.

When I first arrived, my future felt uncertain. I didn't know where I would live. I didn't know how I would rebuild my life. There were moments when the challenges ahead felt overwhelming.

But the Haven didn't just help me through the crisis. They helped me prepare for life beyond their doors.

With their support, encouragement and guidance, I was able to find work and begin earning an income again. It may seem like a simple thing, but for me it represented so much more than a job. It represented freedom. It represented dignity. It represented the beginning of believing in myself again.

For the first time in a very long time, I was able to look ahead with hope instead of fear.

The Haven also assisted me when it came to one of the most important people in my life – my daughter, Zara.

As a mother, there is nothing more important than knowing your child is safe, cared for and given opportunities to thrive.

The Haven helped Zara get into school and helped create stability for her during a time when our lives had been turned upside down. They understood that when you help a mother, you are also helping a child.

Seeing Zara settle into school, make friends and begin enjoying her childhood again brought me more joy than I can put into words.

It reminded me why I had fought so hard to build a better future for us.

One of the greatest gifts The Haven gave me was not simply a safe place to stay. They gave me the tools, confidence and support needed to move forward.

Eventually, I was able to move into a place of my own and begin creating a new home for Zara and me.

I will never forget that feeling.

After everything we had been through, we finally had a place where we could close the door at night and feel safe.

A place filled with peace instead of fear.

A place where healing could continue.

A place where new memories could be made.

That new beginning would not have been possible without the support, guidance and encouragement of The Haven.

They stood beside me every step of the way until I was ready to stand on my own.

PART 3 – THERE IS HOPE

As I stand here today, I know that there are women who are still living in silence.

Women who wake up every morning feeling afraid.

Women who have been told they are not good enough.

Women who have been made to believe that they are the problem.

Perhaps some are sitting here today, quietly wondering if things will ever change.

To those women, I want to say this:

Please don't give up.

There is hope.

You may not believe it today, but one day you will look back and realise that the hardest chapter of your life became the beginning of a brand-new story.

Leaving an abusive relationship is never easy.

It takes courage.

It takes planning.

It often takes many attempts.

Sometimes fear keeps us where we are.
Sometimes we stay because of our children.
Sometimes because of finances.
Sometimes because we've been convinced that no one else will ever love us.
Sometimes because we've forgotten who we were before the abuse began.

But please remember this:

Abuse is never your fault.
You cannot love someone into changing.
You cannot fix someone who refuses to take responsibility for their actions.
And you are never responsible for another person's choice to abuse you.
One of the greatest lessons I have learned is that healing is not about becoming the person you were before.

Healing is about becoming the person you were always meant to be.

It takes time.

There will be good days.

There will be difficult days.

Sometimes you will take two steps forward and one step back.

That doesn't mean you're failing.

It means you're healing.

Every small step matters.

Every boundary you set matters.

Every decision to choose peace over fear matters.

Every day you wake up and keep going is a victory.

I also want to speak to those who support organisations like The Haven.

To every donor...

Every volunteer...

Every staff member...

Every counsellor...

Every person who gives financially...

Every person who prays...

Every person who quietly gives their time without expecting recognition...

Please know that what you do matters.

You may never fully realise the impact of your kindness.

You may never hear every success story.

But because of your generosity, women like me have been given another chance.

Children have found safety.

Families have found hope.
Lives have been rebuilt.
Thank you for choosing compassion.
Thank you for believing that every woman deserves a future free from fear.
Thank you for making The Haven a place where broken hearts begin to heal.
Today, I stand before you not as a victim, but as a survivor.

More than that...

I stand before you as a woman who has found hope again.
A woman who has discovered that her past does not define her future.
A woman who has learned that even after the darkest night, the sun still rises.

There is a quote that has carried me through many difficult days:
"Sometimes when you're in a dark place, you think you've been buried. But perhaps you've actually been planted."

Looking back, I realise that what I thought would destroy me became the very thing that helped me discover my strength, my faith, and my purpose.

I know there are still difficult days.

Healing is a journey.

But today I have peace.

Today I have hope.

Today I have my voice.

And I intend to use that voice to encourage others who may still be living in silence.

If sharing my story gives even one woman, the courage to ask for help...

If it helps one child grow up in a safer home...

If it reminds one person that they are worthy of love and respect...

Then every step of this journey has been worth it.

Before I conclude, there are a few remarkable people whom I simply cannot leave out, because each of them played an important role in helping me rebuild my life.

To Miranda, my social worker, thank you for your guidance, your compassion and your unwavering support. During some of the darkest moments of my life, you listened without judgment, encouraged me when I felt discouraged, and reminded me that I was stronger than I believed. Thank you for walking this journey with me and for helping me find the courage to keep moving forward.

To Antonette, I honestly don't know how to thank you enough. When Zara and I moved into our own home, it was more than just an empty space. Through your kindness and generosity, you helped us furnish our home and turn it into a place of warmth, comfort and love. Even today, you continue

to bless us by bringing food, clothing and practical support whenever we need it. Your generosity has shown us what the love of Christ looks like in action, and I will never forget your kindness.

To Joanne Gooden, my family attorney, thank you for standing beside me through one of the most difficult legal journeys of my life. Divorce is never easy, especially after an abusive relationship, but you treated me with dignity, compassion and professionalism every step of the way. Even today, as I continue to face the challenges of unpaid maintenance and school fees, you continue to fight for justice on behalf of Zara and me. Your dedication has given me strength during moments when I felt exhausted, and I am deeply grateful for everything you have done.

These incredible women have each reminded me that healing is not something we do alone. Sometimes God places people in our lives to carry us when we are too weary to carry ourselves.

They have each been part of the village that helped Zara and me rebuild our lives, and I will always be grateful for their love, their commitment and their unwavering support.

Before I finish, I simply want to say this:

To everyone at The Haven...

You didn't just give me shelter.

You gave me safety.

You didn't just listen to my story.

You helped me rewrite it.

You didn't simply help me survive.

You helped me believe that I could truly live again.

For that, I will be grateful for the rest of my life.

May God continue to bless every person who walks through these doors—whether seeking help or offering it.

May He strengthen the hands of those who serve.

May He comfort every woman who is hurting.

And may The Haven continue to be a beacon of hope, healing, and new beginnings for many years to come.

Thank you for believing in me.

Thank you for believing in women like me.

And thank you for reminding us all that no matter how broken life may seem...

Hope always has the final word.

Thank you, and may God bless you all.

Written by MARTHA ZURICH