

RURAYA

Wanjiru Gichigi



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A LIFE WELL LIVED!

From the beautiful Foothills of Mt Kenya

To Buckingham Palace!

*This is a story of triumph over adversity; A journey of
overcoming Life's challenges and winning!*

Narrated and told by Rosemarie Muthoni Morton

Researched and written by Wanjiru Gichigi

First edition by Lawrence Tahi Gichigi

"Colored photos shared courtesy of John Gichigi."

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To my nephew - Lawrence Tahi Gichigi

A heartfelt thank you to Lawrence Tahi Gichigi for your invaluable support in reviewing and editing the finished manuscript. Your thoughtful suggestions, assistance with the online publication, and consistent presence as a sounding board made a meaningful difference. Your contribution is deeply appreciated, and it was an honor to acknowledge you as a grandchild of Rosemarie Muthoni.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many invisible people whom I spoke to along this journey and who encouraged me with their words of kindness and upliftment by telling me what a wonderful Endeavour it was! There are too many to remember names and others were nameless but their contribution is acknowledged here. If you know you are one of them, please accept my love and gratitude. Others were my two warrior sons, Reletile and Neo, who believed and continued to believe me throughout. I am honored to be our mother! I also acknowledge Andrew with whom i discussed the project on occasions, his dad, John Gichigi, who supplied some of the rare photos and read one of the first manuscripts. Thank you to Tatiana for her unfailing support and encouragement and assistance in uploading the photos as well as other technical help she gave. I appreciate you!

Author's Note



My photo just before my mother, Rosemarie Muthoni returned to Kenya from the Uk for the first time.

I am the third child of Rosemarie Muthoni Morton and was born in Thika where I lived with my grandmother and my younger brother Bro. When my mother left, I was exactly 2yrs and 4 months and we were reunited when I was 10 yrs old and a year later, we joined her in the Uk where she had decided to return in order seek a better life for herself and her children.

Writing this book has been a labour of love and it has gone through many trials and tribulations to get it done.

I was first inspired to write our mother's story back in 1996, when my children, Neo Gitahi and Reletile Riitho were a mere four and two yrs old. I had just purchased a desktop computer on which I started to write the manuscript. As the children were still young, they were excited about this new technology, and I naturally allowed them to play and explore its potential

In their exploration, they managed to displace the manuscript, and I was somehow annoyed about it and wondered how if I could have it retrieved. A friend, whom I had just met, told me not to worry as they knew how to retrieve information, and that it was not all lost. So I gave him access to the Desktop computer and what happened next is that he managed to wipe out everything and put the computer back to factory setting and the manuscript was gone forever. I was flabbergasted to say the least. Dare I say, the friendship ended there and then! It was six years later, when we moved from our home on Brixton Hill, London and relocated to our present home in Thornton, South London. Whilst unpacking and arranging our new home,

that I came across handwritten parts of the Biography manuscript and being excited about the new start in life, I thought it was a good idea to give the book another attempt. I had also just purchased my own laptop, and I was the only person with access to it. So, I excitedly began to retype the script and added new information. By this time, Mum and I had been to Buckingham Palace, and she had also purchased a new Nursing home in Canterbury. It was a thrilling time as my children were now older, and I had more time on my hands to do many things including training as a Primary School Teacher.

This was in 2008 and after renovating the new home and settling down, I felt that it was a high time for me and the boys to visit Kenya again. We had been there twice before whilst they were young and I wanted them to maintain a connection to their ancestral home and bond with other members of our extended family, and particularly, my beloved Aunt Wangui, who had wholeheartedly welcomed us into her home and embraced us with so much love and care for all the time we were there.

Unfortunately, it came to pass that, whilst in Kenya, we had a break-in back in our new home in Thornton Heath and one of the things that was taken was the new laptop with all the manuscript and the new additions of course. I did not realize this until we got back and to say that I was devastated, it is an understatement! I started to think that perhaps this was not meant to be, and it was the universe trying to tell me something! I almost gave up then, but I suppose if there is one quality I inherited from my mother, it is her sheer determination to push forward despite the odds! So, the next time I spent a significant time with her, I started to interview her again and write down the story. By this time, I knew the story quite well, but it was still exciting to hear and write it down.

By this time, I got the involvement of my nephew Lawrence Tahi, who had graduated from university and was now a copy writer and much more up to date with technology. He got me to write it all on Google docs and told me that it could never be lost again! What a relief that

was! I was doing pretty well, when in 2018, I decided to embark on a Master's Degree in Dance Anthropology at the University of Roehampton, London which turned out to be more challenging than I had expected and instead of doing it in one year, I was encouraged by my professor, Helen Hammond, to spread it over two years, which was a lot more manageable for the mature brain that was now me! Graduation was due in June 2020, but Lo behold, the Corona Epidemic was announced in February of that year and everything changed. We had to do all our work online, including the choreography which we had meticulously planned for the physical theatre space over the two years. It was crazy to say the least and very stressful indeed. So the Biography took another setback.

Since then, my events have taken place, which will require its own book in the future! This included me partially moving to Kenya in October 2020, after the first Lockdown. Deep down in my spirit, I had a feeling that there was going to be another Lockdown; they were insinuating on the news, and I wanted to visit my

Aunty before anything happened to her. This led me to buying a land with my brother John, where I now spend 6 months of the year building a home from home. It is at the coast, which I later found out that it was a desire I had expressed in a journal way back when. A manifestation in real time!

It would be an understatement to say that this has been a Labour of Love, and a very challenging undertaking - I have never written a book before and it has been a tremendous effort and push on my part. But I am thankful and happy that I did not give up. I dare not say how many years it has taken to get here but I can mention that my sons, Neo and Reletile were six and four years old when I first found the inspiration to write this story. They are now in their early 30s!

I, personally, have grown and changed - not only older, but I believe also mentally and spiritually. This biography has taken many forms and gone through different approaches and ways of writing. The involvement of Lawrence, my nephew has been great as he encouraged me and

read through the script, editing and making suggestions which improved the quality of writing in many ways. I have always had the encouragement of my dear sons, Neo and Reletile, my other nephew, Andrew as well as his dad, my brother John, who has also read part of the manuscript and supplied me with some key photos he had in his possession. There are other people who supported and assisted me in different ways- even by merely saying, what a great idea it was'! One of those people is the Secretary at The Red House Nursing Home, Tatiana Balycova, who helped me format the photographs and send them to Lawrence, who had now moved to Portugal and was married to his sweetheart, Natalie.

Although I would have loved to have finished this project much earlier in my life, I do not regret it. I believe that I am now in a place in life, where I understand (or over stand as we say in spiritual circles), that although we think that we are in control of our lives and destinies, there is a greater power in control and that this power, call it God or the Universal Force, is essentially

orchestrating everything in the universe; from the sun rises to the sunsets, the moon rises and everything else in between and that it is the right time for this book to be born. I give thanks for this understanding, and I hope this biography will bring much pleasure and give encouragement and inspiration to many people all over the world, including, Rosemarie Muthoni grandchildren and great grand children!

A Brief History about the Agikuyu

The area where the Kikuyu people chose to settle is the Southwestern flank of Mount Kenya, which was typically known by them as Kirinyaga. According to Kikuyu mythology, God (or "Ngai" as he is known in Kikuyu) created the first man, Gikuyu and a woman, Mumbi and put them in this part of the country. He allocated the land to them as far as they could see and told them to go forth and multiply. This area now includes the following modern counties, Murang'a, Nyeri, Kiambu, Nyandarua, Kirinyaga and Nakuru.

The Kikuyu people trace their origin to this couple, Gikuyu and Mumbi. The first couple was bestowed with the gift of nine daughters (some say it was ten). From these nine daughters come all the Kikuyu people. So basically, the Kikuyu stem from a matriarchal lineage with the woman, Mumbi, being the supreme mother. Her name actually means the potter or the creator!

The Kikuyu had an elaborate system of social organization based on kinship and age-group systems. Both these systems emphasized group life. The life of the Kikuyu was very much influenced by the belief in ancestral powers and the belief and respect of the one God, Ngai. These traditions and beliefs have been eroded over time, through colonialism and the modernization of the country, with more and younger people moving to work in cities and studying abroad in countries such as the UK and the USA. A good book to read and learn about the original traditional values and beliefs of the Kikuyu would be ‘Facing Mt. Kenya’ by the late President, Jomo Kenyatta.

PROLOGUE

In September 1960, Rosemarie Muthoni Gichigi embarked on an extraordinary journey, not knowing where it would take her or what she would find. With a small suitcase, two dresses and a pair of shoes, she launched into an adventure to fulfill a dream of escaping poverty, within a time frame of three years, so that she could return to her children and change their lives. For various reasons that will be explained later, the venture took 9 years of hardship, challenges and difficulties which changed her life, her children's lives, and the lives of many other people.

Rosemarie Muthoni's sheer determination and desire to change her life occurred during the rolling 1960s; a time of great change and excitement. Three years after she boarded the VC10 airplane that was to take her to the United Kingdom, (known as "Ruraya" in the Kikuyu

language, which basically means “a faraway place” or Ulaya in Swahili), Kenya gained democratic rule by declaring independence from Great Britain on December 12th 1963, thereby technically becoming free from its Colonial oppressors. It had been a decade since the Mau Mau — also known as The Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) — initiated a rebellion against the colonial rulers and their administration in 1952. Those were very difficult times for everyone in the country, and it was not until 1960 when the leader, Dedan Kimathi was arrested and detained and subsequently hanged for his activism, that talks of independence started in earnest.

This is the story of a little girl who lived in a mud hut on the foothills of Mount Kenya; one of seven children who thrived on very little to eat but who dreamt a big dream of going somewhere better than where she was; of having more than one dress to wear, and having enough food in the cupboard to eat so that she would never ever again go hungry. This is a story of tenacity, determination and sheer stubbornness of one

woman's aspiration to be more than she was brought up to be. Through good and bad times, this story charts a journey filled with challenges and difficulties, highs and lows, laughter and tears, but a story focused on one woman's ability to overcome adversity and achieve success beyond anyone's imagination — even her own.



One of the earliest photographs of Rosemarie Muthoni with her family, taken in Kenya in the early 1900s.

Seated, from left to right: Philip Gichigi (father), Salome Wanjiru (mother), Christine Wangeci (youngest sister), and Rosemarie Muthoni.

Standing at the back: Daniel Mwangi and Moses Thurura (brothers).

The British Empire established the East African Protectorate in 1895 and Kenya formally came under the control of the British Government. This meant that Rosemarie's father, Philip Gichigi, born in 1888, came under the British Protectorate Administration and his children thereafter were British subjects. Prior to the Colonial administration coming to Kenya, the land around Mount Kenya (Kirinyaga), is where the Kikuyu people had lived for centuries and was and is viewed as ancestral land. The Kikuyu people had in place, undisputed chiefs, who governed for the various surrounding areas.

One of the most heroic and famous of them was Wa'ngombe wa Ihura, a chief who reigned over the western flank of Mount Kenya, where Muthoni's family originated. The main job of these chiefs was to keep peace between the warring 'tribes', especially between the Kikuyu and the Maasai. Chief Wa'ngombe himself was the son of a Kikuyu man and a Maasai woman, and was born around 1849, in a place called Tetu in Kamakwa, which is near present day Nyeri Town.

By the time Rosemarie Muthoni was born, the British Colonial administration had established a small trading post around Mount Kenya in 1902, which consequently started to attract a trickle of European settlers, missionaries and Indian merchants. It was soon to become a trading Centre for the settlers, who unscrupulously acquire large portions of land and became farmers, producers of cattle, wheat and coffee. To this day, Nyeri still hosts the structural remnants of this period in the form of sites like The Nyeri Golf Club, The White Rhino Hotel and the most famous of all, The Outspan Hotel with its now famous The Treetops Hotel.

Treetops Hotel has a special place in Rosemarie's heart, because it was here where Princess Elizabeth stayed for a night on February the 5th 1952 accompanied by her new husband, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. She went up one night and overnight her father King George VI passed away, which meant she succeeded him as the Queen of Great Britain and the Commonwealth immediately. On the

previous day, Rosemarie and her fellow training nurses had lined the streets of Nyeri bearing the British flag to welcome Princess Elizabeth and her husband to Kenya. Since that visit, and the historic event that took place here, Treetops has become an iconic hotel, visited by many ‘notable’ people such as, Charlie Chaplin, a comic actor of the silent movie era; Joan Crawford, an American Hollywood actress of the 1930s and Lord Mountbatten, a relative of Elizabeth II and a great grandson of Queen Victoria. Treetops stand on vast acres of land in Nyeri in the same grounds of The Outspan Hotel, which was built by Eric Sherbrook Walker in the 1920s.

The 69 acres of ‘Crown land’ on the lush green grounds of Kenya's coffee and tea-growing highland overlooks the gorge of a river in the Aberdare Mountain ranges; the second highest mountain range in Kenya. The Outspan Hotel is still in use today and is a worthwhile place to visit, whilst Treetops, according to Wikipedia, was closed in 2021 due to lack of visitors.

The Treetops Hotel was originally and built in 1932 at the request of Sherbrook Walker's wife, Lady Bettie Fielding. It was a tree house erected on a 300 year old wild fig tree (notably known as 'The Mugumo Tree', a very sacred tree of the Kikuyu people. It overlooked a drinking lake for various animals that used it as a watering hole as the migrated to their next feeding spot. According to Wikipedia, the original hotel was burnt down by the Mau Mau (Kenya Land and Freedom Army) on May 27th 1954 as a protest against the Shoot-on-Sight orders that were implemented by the British Administration and the repeated military actions taken against the Kikuyu people. It was apparently rebuilt in 1957 on a nearby chestnut tree.

The area around where these hotels are found, Nyeri, is also famously known for hosting the tomb of Robert Baden Powell, the founder of the International Scout Movement. Baden Powell apparently travelled often to Kenya and fell in love with the country, spending his winter months away from Europe at the Outspan Hotel, owned by his friend Eric Sherbrook Walker. It is

said that he enjoyed the favorable climate of Nyeri and eventually built a home in the grounds of the Outspan, naming it Paxtu, after the name of his London Home Pax Hill. The house is now a monument and museum devoted to the scouts' movement and Baden Powell's life. Him and his wife's tomb also lay on these grounds.

Finally, Nyeri is the hometown of the late Nobel laureate, Wangari Maathai, who became the first African woman to get this prize. She was born in a town called Ihithe where she lived for quite a while before moving to Rift Valley. Wangari attended Ihithe Primary School, later going to study in the United States, where she earned her Bachelor and Master's Degree. She subsequently earned her P.H.D in Philosophy from the University of Nairobi in 1971. Wangari Maathai is known for her activism and she formed a non-governmental organization called The Green Belt Movement, an organization that focused on the planting of trees, environmental conservation and women's rights. She made significant contributions to ecology and environmental issues but sadly died of complications to Ovarian

cancer in September 2011. It has been said that Wangari may have been a distant relative of Rosemarie's family, but that is something that has neither been researched nor confirmed.

RURAYA

Chapter 1

I Rosemarie Muthoni Gichigi Morton, born in Kamakwa, a small village in Nyeri Central Province of what was then the British Protectorate Kenya was one of seven children; four boys and three girls, born to Salome.

Wanjiru Riitho and Philip Gichigi Thurura. My mother, Salome Wanjiru was the daughter of Riitho and Muthoni (who was known by many names, one being Mukami (meaning a milkmaid). My father, Philip Gichigi's parents were Thurura and Wangui. Thurura was an orphan boy from the Maasai tribe, who somehow ended up in another province of Nyeri called Othaya but nobody really knows how he got

there. He was subsequently adopted by Chief Stefano Kibera.



(Rosemarie's parents – her father Philip Gichigi and mother Salome Wanjiru Gichigi)

In the Kikuyu tradition of those times, you were able to adopt a child from another tribe or clan by slaughtering a goat and initiating them into their clan. Chief Stefano Kibera had four wives and he decided to give this boy, Ole Thurura, to the first wife to bring him up as her own child. Thurura therefore, grew up as a kikuyu although he was originally Maasai. In those days, the

kikuyu people and the Maasai people frequently had conflicts where the winning clan could end up with the other clan's cattle, women and children. This could have been how Thurura ended up in Kikuyu land and this is how we acquired Maasai blood in our family.

When my grandfather Thurura grew up and became a young man, he met a Kikuyu woman called Wangui, whom he eventually married. They had several children, all of whom sadly passed away due to various illnesses, but they were survived by a son, Philip Gichigi, and a daughter, Wangeci. They then moved to Nyeri where his wife Wangui passed away shortly afterwards, whilst still quite young, leaving him a widower with two young children. Through another misfortune, his only daughter, Wangeci died while giving birth to twins. This was such a shock to Thurura and he eventually passed away from sadness and heartache.

My father (Philip Gichigi) was therefore left alone, an orphan just like his father. Before my grandfather died, he asked his good friend, Ngechu wa Kagera, to take care of his boy as he was aware he would not live much longer. So this is what happened and my father was then brought up by a man by the name of Ngechu until he was old enough to look after himself.

My father began his working life as a herds boy and later found employment with an Englishman, caring for his horses. He somehow managed to go to school in Tumu Tumu Mabere, where he met my mother, Salome Wanjiru, a beautiful kikuyu girl with a breath-taking smile and they got married by a Scottish man by the name of Reverend Brown and then moved to live in Kamakwa, Nyeri.

Kamakwa is where my six siblings and I grew up in a mud hut at the foothills of Mt Kenya. We had a very humble livelihood, quite poor really as our father had chosen to become an assistant

priest for The Church of England diocese, which meant he was unpaid. We survived on church collection that was donated by church goers on a Sunday or when he performed a funeral rite, which he was very bad at, as he cried along with the mourners and often had to be prevented from falling into the grave as he committed the body to the earth – dust to dust, ashes to ashes! The collection that he brought home was often in the form of eggs, bananas, sugar cane and potatoes or whatever one could afford to give to the church. This was, obviously, not enough to feed seven hungry mouths and a wife and I remember as a child being hungry all the time and suffering from tummy aches! I remember crying all the time for food that was never forthcoming – or not enough by any means!

The birthplace of Rosemarie Muthoni, Nyeri has been the home of the Kikuyu people for centuries. It is situated somewhere between the southern to the western flank of Mount Kenya. Did you know that Mount Kenya is an extinct

volcano which is recorded to have risen an estimated 3 million years ago! Its last eruption was said to be around 2.6 million years ago.

This ancient volcano is thought to have risen to 6,500 metres high during its activity period. Its height is currently estimated to be around 5,199m. Mount Kenya or Kirinyaga to the Kikuyu people has been held as the sacred dwelling place of their God, (Ngai) and in the olden days, the Kikuyu always built their homes with the doorway facing this sacred mountain.



The two older sister, Martha Wangui and Rosemarie Muthon

Chapter 2

When we were born, birth control was not widely available, and women often had many children. This has been okay when families had large pieces of land before the British arrived. However, our mother, “Maitu” as she was known, struggled to raise her seven children as times had changed so much and the cost of living became monetary, rather than land and cattle based. Maitu was a very clever and hard working woman and understood the importance of nutrition that would prevent her children from becoming malnourished.

She often went to the market where she would exchange foods such as ripe bananas or porridge for beans, which she knew contained second class proteins that could prevent many childhood illnesses of the time. This was due to the fact that

she had medical knowledge, which she had gained whilst working in Tumu Tumu hospital.

As children, we all worked very hard, though I somehow gained a reputation as one of the laziest among us. Every day, we had to travel to the river to fetch water for cooking and bathing and fetch firewood which had to be carried on our backs with a rope on our heads, all the way home. Up to today, I bear an indentation on my head where the rope pressed down on the scalp. Our mother had also shown us which wild leaves contained Vitamin C to collect and bring home to cook. We also had to help in the Shamba; a small piece of land where we grew a few foods, such as maize, sweet potato, arrowroot and bananas.

Our living conditions were cramped, to say the least. We often slept four to a bed, which meant that two of us had to sleep on the floor each night, taking turns and swapping places the following evening. Clothing was scarce as

well—I vividly remember having to share a single Sunday dress with my older sister, Wangui. She would attend church in the morning, and I would wear the same dress to Sunday school in the afternoon. Being the younger one, the dress hung off me—far too big and far too long. Because of this, some unkind neighbors, particularly those from the church, mockingly referred to us as "*The One Dress Family*."

Being the second of the seven children, I was named Muthoni after my maternal grandmother, in keeping with Kikuyu tradition. The firstborn, my sister Wangui, was named after our paternal grandmother. This naming custom has been followed for generations, rooted in the Kikuyu belief that ancestors never truly die but continue to live on through their descendants. Our family was completed by my siblings Daniel, Moses, Stephen, Wakarugi, and the youngest, my sister Wangeci.

Did you know that, in traditional Kikuyu culture, the birth of a child was announced by a designated woman who would ululate loudly to inform the entire village of the new arrival? Three ululations signified the birth of a girl, while five meant a boy had been born—a beautiful and vibrant tradition of welcoming new life into the community.

By the time we were in our adolescence, our father had become a very strict disciplinarian and conservative man, perhaps due to his conversion to Christianity. He still, nevertheless, held on to the belief that one should only educate boys as he was convinced that they would be the ones to look after him and his wife in old age and that educating girls would have been a waste of money as they eventually would get married and leave the homestead.

In those days, everyone had to pay for schooling right from the start. As my father was part of the church and the fact that he did not get paid, his

first three children were allowed to attend school, free of charge. The only schools that were around were missionary schools and you had to convert to Christianity to be allowed to attend. When my father asserted that he would only educate the boys, my mother was furious and fought her daughters' corner, insisting that all the children should get a chance to be educated equally. A huge disagreement ensued which nearly broke their marriage, as his wife threatened to leave and take the girls with her and leave homestead, if he insisted on educating the boys alone. He eventually accepted and that's how the girls got an education.

Maitu, who as mentioned early, was a naturally intelligent woman, was a respectable member of her community and women often came to her for advice on various matters, which she solved and dealt with, with wisdom and clarity. She was like the village Ambassador as she was one of the first people in the village to get British education by attending a missionary school. As

one of the first ones, or “*mambere*”, to be educated in Nyeri by the then Church of Scotland Mission, she subsequently converted to Christianity by being baptized by Reverend Brown.

The school she attended was called Tumu Tumu Mission of Scotland School, which was run by a Scottish man called Reverend ‘Bwana’ Brown, and Sister ‘Bibi’ Garrick. They were instructed by their superior that to attract the locals to come to the missionary school, they should occasionally host a BBQ, slaughter a cow and as the Kikuyu loved meat and did not eat it often, they would come, and the missionaries would befriend them. The villagers knew that when this happened, they could go and eat and drink everything for free.

My father later recalled being told by Father Brown that although school was free at that time (parents did not have to pay in the beginning), there would come a time when they would have

to pay for their children to attend. My father and other elders laughed and said that would never happen. They insisted that if they ever had to pay and there was no BBQ, they would not bring their children there; they just would not do that.

Years later when his children became old enough to attend school, he suddenly found he had to find school fees and that's when he recalled what father Brown had told them. It was too late now as it was the one thing, but he could not believe that it had come true.

We finally attended school in Nyeri town which was around five miles away from home. I remember having to walk for miles barefooted and crying all the way, as we hadn't had sufficient breakfast and then crying all the way back home to get a meager meal in the evening; and sometimes nothing at all. It was a hard life for a small child, and I vowed then that one day I would have enough food to eat and enough clothes to wear. I used to tell my mother that one

day, I would go somewhere far away from there. She would look at me and laugh and ask me where I thought I would go. She called me lazy and at times, she called me ugly and a waste of space. This of course hurt me a lot and perhaps that is why I worked so hard to prove her wrong. Luckily for me I had my father who loved me dearly and looked out for me. Later on when I brought my mother to the UK in the 1980s, she was so surprised and shocked as to how hard-working I was.

Nonetheless, my sister Wangui, who she thought highly of, did very well in school. Unfortunately for her, she left school early to work to support the family, as we were now burdened with school fees and quite literally starving. She only completed primary education, which was a shame as she was capable of so much more. I only managed to carry on to high school (secondary school) with my sister's help. She donated and sold her only cow and calf which provided milk for the family so that I could

continue schooling. I have never forgotten that sacrifice and returned the favor by supporting her for years and I still do so even today. I will never forget what my sister Wangui did for me! Wangui has always been a source of help and assistance to many members of the family; including looking after our father till his passing in 1972. We often joke that the cow is still providing milk after all these years!

I attended Mathari High School, in Nyeri, which was a Catholic Consolata Missionary boarding School, and I was very happy there. I had enough food to eat and although it was the basic staple food of maize and beans and a little meat added to it at the weekend, it was luxury to me! We nonetheless had to attend church first thing in the morning before breakfast, which was "*oshoro*" (porridge) and after school, we attended mass again before supper. All the teachers were Italian nuns as the school was a very strict catholic school and we were terrified of them. I have memories of walking from high school, Mathari

Consolata Mission School, all the way to Nyeri town, which was quite a long way from us. Sister Karina would be at the front, leading a group of girls and we had the task of reciting the prayers with the rosary, all the way to Nyeri town and back! Looking back, I do not know why we took this walk; perhaps because the sister was in love with Father Burrow, who was the priest in charge of the training school for priests and Sister Karina was in charge of the girls.

When I left school, I wanted to become a nurse, but my father wanted me to become a teacher, which I hated so much and knew it was something I could not do effectively. He insisted and even sent me to do a placement at a school. I remember how I used to cry every morning as I walked to the school to teach but was so frightened of my father and therefore did what he said although I detested it. I think I taught for about one year and then I had had enough.

I therefore, secretly applied for nurse training in Mombasa, Kenya's biggest coastal city, using the Postal Office box number of a church member and waited for the application form to come through. It never did. I used to wonder why. Eventually, a neighbor told me what had happened to my forms. She told me that my parents had confiscated the forms and burnt them as they did not want me to go to Mombasa to become a nurse as they believed that all the girls that went to train as nurses there, became prostitutes. When I found this out, I asked another church member if I could use her box number and not to let my parents know, which she promised she would do. This time, I applied for training in Nairobi and received the application form which I immediately sent back. I was accepted and I was over the moon but could not tell my parents, especially my father. I therefore made my plans without anyone knowing and disappeared from home, went to Nairobi and started my training as a midwife. No one knew where I had gone for three whole months.

When I took off to go to Nairobi, I did not know exactly where it was or even how to get there. I was frightened of the thought of going to such a big city as we had heard so many bad stories about it. We heard of how people went there but never came back, but we also heard about the opportunities that were available and the exciting things that went on there too. As I nervously packed my bags and left Nyeri, I was anxious and scared but determined to find my way out of poverty.

It was January 1950, when I my training at Pumwani Maternity Hospital, Nairobi started. The hospital is still standing to this day. Whilst in Nyeri, I had been inspired to become a midwife after meeting a lady by the name of Ruth Ben, whom I admired so much. She was always well presented, clean and a very kind person and I wanted to be like her. Once in Pumwani, I was welcomed by the matron, who went by the name of Katherine Ford and oversaw training the girls who came there. We were very

much taken care of and protected from the public; sometimes literal under lock and key. We were paid 30 Kenyan shillings per month, which was decent money then. Now that's around 30p.

During the first three months I was there, Matron Ford and Doctor Williams, who oversaw the training school, asked me why I did not receive visitors like the other girls. I was nervous but decided to confide in them that I was afraid my father would come and take me back to Nyeri and insist on me becoming a teacher. Matron Ford reassured me that no such thing could happen and that it would not be allowed. This made me feel better and was then able to tell my parents where I was and they came to see me. I stayed there for two years and proudly received my certificate in midwifery training in 1952.



*Rosemarie training at Pumwani Maternity Hospital,
Nairobi in January 1950*

Early Nursing in Kenya

Nursing in Kenya began as early as 1908 and was conducted without a formal framework until 1950, when it was implemented partly due to an increased demand on health care and as well the growth of the population in Kenya.

The Nursing service was at the time was provided by missionaries who were assisted by African staff nurses. These were mainly male at

the time and were commonly known as 'dressers'. It was 1950 when a meeting of the Nurses and Midwives Council of Kenya decided to formalize the training.

The first examinations for Assistant Enrolled Nurses as they were then called were approved in 1952 and an inspection of the schools was also implemented to take place every three years.

Chapter 3

The training at Pumwani took two years, as mentioned earlier, and I had a very good time plus a few hilarious experiences as a junior midwife that I will never forget. The first one was when I was sent to empty a full bedpan, (a container that is used in place of a toilet for bedridden patients who cannot walk to the facilities) after an expectant mother had been given an enema. As I took the pan, full of waste matter to the sluice room, but could not carry it without shaking and I vomited all the way there every time I looked into it! I was sick for the rest of the day, unable to touch my clothes, nor eat. After that I did not think I could become a nurse. It was a shock, because no one had shown me what to do or what to expect.

The other experience was even more devastating and the staff midwife who was in charge nearly

lost her job through this incident. I had always wanted to see a baby being born, so I begged and constantly bothered the sister in charge to allow me to watch, but she refused again and again. It was not permitted until a student acquired some training, for good reasons as I later found out. I bothered the sister so much that one day whilst Matron Ford was away, she decided to allow me into the delivery room.

I was not prepared for what happened next as I had never seen a baby being born. It all went well in the beginning as I stood or sat at the bottom of the delivery bed. Once the baby's head started to appear and the mother started to make a lot of uncomfortable noises, I began to panic. I thought she was going to die and felt completely helpless, so I started screaming and crying with her, banging my fists on the wall and calling out for someone to come and save her. The delivery nurse was torn between doing her job, which was delivering a healthy baby and dealing with a hysterical nurse. I kept screaming,

shouting and banging on the wall calling for help. It was chaotic was therefore completely unaware that Matron Ford, a big strong woman, had come up behind me. She grabbed me by the scruff of my neck and literally lifted me off my feet and threw me out of the delivery room and shutting the door behind me. I was still screaming and crying as I lay on the floor outside, when the Matron finally came back out. She was furious and she sent me off to my dormitory to rest, telling me to go and see her the next day when I had recovered. I can only imagine what she said to the Staff midwife, who allowed me to watch the delivery. She must have gotten into real trouble. After that, Matron Ford was uncertain if I was cut out to be a midwife, but two years later, I passed all my exams with flying colours.

I applied for a job in two locations straight away, one in Nyeri and one in Nairobi. By this time, the wages were paid in British Guineas and was offered three guineas in Nairobi in a mission hospital and four guineas in Nyeri Hospital for

the same post. One guinea was equivalent to 21 shillings, which is around £1.00. So I was being offered either £3.00 or £4.00 per month. Well, I took £4.00 of course and worked in Nyeri for less than a year when a post for Midwife in charge of a ward in Thika Hospital came up. They were offering 6 guineas and I therefore jumped at the opportunity.

Before leaving Nyeri, in 1952, I had the chance of being chosen to line up and dance for the then Princess Elizabeth and her husband, Prince Philip, on their way to Treetops Hotel, where they stayed for a night on their way to other parts of the country on their tour of the commonwealth countries. I remember seeing this beautiful young princess, wearing a can polka dot dress and white shoes. She had a feather hat and her waist was slim and tightly held in a pretty bow. Her husband was in white royal regalia, and he was tall and handsome, towering above the delicate demure Princess. I was awestruck by

this experience and have been a fan of the royal family ever since.

From Princess to Queen Elizabeth in Kenya

The then Princess Elizabeth had left London Airport, escorted by her father, King George VI, the Queen Mother, and her sister Princess Margaret, and boarded a BOAC Argonaut plane for a flight to Nairobi, Kenya on January 31, 1952. She was to visit Kenya to kick off a six months tour of the commonwealth countries, which included Canada and Australia. As she stepped off the plane and into the hot sunshine of Nairobi, little did she or anyone know that five days later, she would become Queen Elizabeth. She and her new husband, Prince Philip of Spain first travelled to Sagana Royal Lodge before proceeding to the now famous Treetops Hotel, where she ascended the rickety steps to the two

roomed tree house on 5th February as Princess Elizabeth and descended the next day as The Queen of England and the Commonwealth as her father had passed away overnight in the UK

The Tree Tops tree house was perched on an ancient Wild Fig tree (Mugumo tree to the Kikuyu). The tree is said to have been over 300 years old and stood on an elephant migration path, where many animals, including buffaloes stopped for water and salt lick.



I left my post in Nyeri for an offer of a position at Thika Hospital, 70km away. I was to oversee the maternity unit that held around 250 antenatal clinics every month and delivered between 7-10 babies a week. It was exciting to come to Thika which now had electricity and water and the railway line

from Nairobi had also been established in 1913.

During my time as a midwife in Thika, I gave birth to my first-born child, John, in the same labour ward that I was working in and I even worked that day before I delivered him. My friend, Winifred Muthoni was my midwife. John was 7lb in weight and I had a very long labour with him. It was the same year that I also bought my first house which previously belonged to a Somali woman who wanted to return back to her country of origin after her husband died. It was a plot with four units in Thika Town, called Majengo and I was very proud to own it. I spent time there whenever I had time off work, and the rest of the time in the nursing quarters.

I eventually invited my mother to come to live there with and she continued to reside there for many years after. I was much happier being in

Thika more than Nyeri, where I was born and I soon established myself as a ‘well to do personality’ in the town. They called me Daktari! (Doctor in Swahili) My second child, Paul, who we known as “Bro”, was born in 1956. The matron in Pumwani Hospital Nairobi where I trained invited me to come and deliver my second born there as a former member of staff without charging me. Therefore, Bro was born in Nairobi.

All about Thika

Thika was and still is, an industrial town and a major commerce hub in Kiambu County. It lies 26 miles northeast of Nairobi on the confluence of the Thika and Chania rivers. It was apparently established towards the end of the 19th century by European and Asian settlers, who created schools, farms, health care and businesses in the region. There stands, in Thika, a pillar monument that commemorates its founding. It is also documented (Wikipedia) that

Thika is the historical site of the Mugumo Gardens, which was apparently the site of the giant fig tree, where the legendary Mugo wa Kibiru made his prophecy.

Mugo wa kibiru was a Kenyan sage of the Akikuyu people, who lived in the 18th and early 19th century. His name Mugo means ‘a healer’ but he is also known as ‘Chege wa Kibiru’. His fame rose because he accurately prophesied the coming of the ‘Mzungu’ (white man), on African soil long before the British Missionaries came to Kenya. In Kikuyu folklore, it is documented that he foretold of a race of people, whose skin complexion resembled a small pale colored frog, whose blood flow could be seen under their skins, just like the frogs. He prophesied that these pale strangers would have clothing that would resemble butterflies (ciihuruta) in the way they were colorful. He also warned the warriors that it would be useless to approach these people with their spears because they would be carrying magical sticks that could produce fire (guns firing bullets). One of his most famous

prophecies was the coming of the railway train, which he described as an iron snake with legs like an earthworm and that it would be eating Caucasians (white people) and vomiting them out whenever it stopped.

Mugo foretold that the Kikuyu and other peoples of Kenya would be colonized by the Caucasians. He advised his people to learn the virtues of the Caucasianman but keenly reject his vices. He also predicted that the giant fig tree, 15 feet in diameter located in Thika, would wither and die by the day Kenya would gain independence.

This prophecy was taken very seriously, even by the British colonialists. So much so that they reinforced this fig tree with a mound of earth and built an iron ring around it to prevent it from falling.

It is documented that shortly before Kenya gained independence from the British, the fig tree or mugumo was struck by lightning and began to wither rapidly. When Kenya gained

independence on 12th December 1963, the tree decayed and died, thereby fulfilling Chege wa Kibiru's prophecy that had been declared a century earlier.



Whilst in Thika, I experienced all sorts of deliveries, i.e twins, breach birth, (babies coming feet first) hydrocephalus (babies with fluid in their head). I also had some other unusual experiences. For example, once when I was delivering twins, I noticed that the mother's x-ray showed two babies, but after delivering the twins, I noticed that her stomach was still unusually big, so I decided to listen on a stethoscope. I heard a fetal heart beat and decided to go and tell the Doctor in charge on that day. He disagreed with me and an argument ensued.

I asked him to come and see for himself which he did. When he came, he wanted to

demonstrate that there weren't any more babies and it was just a large placenta. So he pressed on the fundus (the upper part of the abdomen). As he pressed down hard, the baby came shooting out onto the bottom of the bed, which damaged his brain and he lived only for two days! I was very upset by this but could do nothing about his misdiagnosis and the death of a healthy baby. I know that if this was in the UK, it would have been a big case and the doctor would have been in a lot of trouble, but in Kenya in those days, he got away with it.

These kinds of experiences gave me the ability to diagnose a variety of delivery problems. I saved many babies and their mothers from issues such as 'prolonged arms' which is when a baby's arm comes out first, or 'prolonged umbilical cord' which is when the cord comes out before the baby and can cause death. Even more serious ones like a 'ruptured uterus', which is where the uterus tears horizontally across the tummy. This means, the baby comes out of the uterus into the mother's internal organs and could potentially

kill both the mother and baby. Diagnosing this kind of complication early, allows the mother and baby to be rushed for an emergency caesarean operation. This is a very difficult diagnosis to detect. I had an experience of such a case and the mother and son never forgot it. The mother continued to tell her son how I saved their lives! The son even came to meet me at the airport when I came back from training in the UK.

A State of Emergency

It was also around this time that Kenya also experienced the State of Emergency. It had been happening slowly but took a dramatic turnaround in 1953. The Colonial British Government was fighting the freedom fighters, named the Mau Mau but who called themselves, The Kenyan Land and Freedom Army(KLFA). The Mau Mau were fighting for their land and freedom by all means necessary and the ordinary citizens were caught in the middle. It is written

that resentment grew among the Kikuyu people during the early 1950s against the British settlement, their land expropriation and the lack of political representation of the indigenous people.

The Mau Mau, as they were now commonly referred, made their presence known in the latter half of 1952 with an attack on those Africans who appeared to side with the British Colonial Administration. This Land and Freedom Army was led by Dedan Kimathi Waciuri, and it is recorded as being one of the British Army's bloodiest post war conflicts and known to have helped hasten Kenya's Independence of 1963. Wikipedia among other writings go on to describe how the British Army fought the war by setting up Detention camps for those suspected of being associated with the Mau Mau. This included the elderly and even children, who were subjected to extreme methods of torture to extract information and limit the uprising. It is also said that over one million Kenyans (some

say more) were forcibly removed from their homes and put into camps.



This was a very difficult time for us all. We feared both the British Colonial Administration and the Freedom Army and could not even go shopping without the fear of being caught by either side. If you were known to be a supporter of the Mau Mau and had taken an oath of allegiance, the British could kill you and if the Mau Mau knew you had not taken the oath and therefore might be a supporter of the British, they would give it to you by force and if you refused they would just kill you. You were caught between a rock and a hard place and witnessed many atrocities. Many families were broken up and caught between taking the oath of the Mau Mau and siding with the British Administration. It caused a lot of pain and fear,

separation of families and many people died unnecessarily. Those who were not killed and but found to be members of the Mau Mau, were imprisoned in islands, such as Lamu.

The Rebellion begins

The Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau) rebellion took place between 1952 -1960. There were many deaths and tortures on both sides, but in comparison, the native Kenyans death toll outnumbered the British. Some recordings talk about at least 11,000 deaths amongst the Mau Mau and their supporters, which included an estimated 1,090 executions by hanging. On the British side, there is an estimated death of around 200 soldiers and 32 British civilian settlers.

It was incredibly difficult for me as a working health professional as I often came face to face with injured Mau Mau's who were brought to the hospital for treatment. In one incident, I was called over by an arrested Mau Mau, chained to a bed who quietly spoke to me in my language, Kikuyu, asking me if I had taken the Oath of Allegiance to the Mau Mau. I was mortified and could neither say 'Yes' or 'No', because if I said yes to the Mau Mau, the British Army would have arrested me and perhaps tortured me or killed me, and if I said No, then the Mau Mau would have sent someone to administer it to me by force or kill me if I refused. It was a torturous dilemma to be caught in.

The fight for Land and Freedom

Although the Mau Mau, primarily consisted of the Kikuyu people, members of other ethnic groups were also involved, as they also opposed

the British Colonial rule and the expropriation of their land. As recorded (Wikipedia), the British settlers had some of the richest agricultural soils in the world in districts in Kenya where the elevation and climate made it possible for Europeans to reside permanently. Over 7m acres of fertile land mostly in the hilly regions of central and Rift Valley provinces were seized through expropriation (the action of dispossessing someone of land or property)

The capture and execution of Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi on 21st October 1956, signaled the defeat of the Mau Mau and essentially ended the British Campaign. Nonetheless, there were some surviving rebellions led by remaining leaders, such as Field Marshall Musa Mwariama and General Baimungi, who was one of the last Mau Mau leaders to be killed shortly after Kenya attained self rule. (Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mau_Mau_rebellion)

Chapter 4

The Birth of Kenya Cannery Ltd

Thika was increasingly becoming a major industrial Town when a man named Theo West, who ran a big canning operation in England, went into partnership with Herberts family who owned around 50 acre of pineapple farms around Thika to start Kenya Cannery Ltd. This industrialization brought many people to Thika, and the population grew tremendously. The industry was later bought by Del Monte in 1965.

Thika is also the home of the famous Blue Post Hotel which stands near the famous Chania Falls. It still stands today and as a historical and enchanting place to visit.

I stayed in Thika Hospital for around 6 years, when I came across an advert for a First Aider

post at a large company that made tin cans for fruits, called Metal Box. They were offering double the money I was currently receiving at Thika Hospital and even though I was not technically a First Aider, I applied for and got the position. It was an easier job than my post as a midwife and gave me a relief from the strenuous and stressful work in the hospital. I did not stay very long as I always sought better jobs to improve my life.

One day whilst there, I came across an advert for a District Midwife in a new estate that was being built in Nairobi. I contacted a lady by the name of Mrs. Davis, a Welsh midwife supervisor, and went for an interview and subsequently got the job. At the time, I was pregnant with my last-born child, Wanjiru, the Author of this Biography and was not quite ready to start work. Mrs. Davis said that was fine, as the construction was not yet complete but would be finished by the time I had the baby. She advised me to wait 6 months after giving birth before starting work.

So as soon as I was ready, I moved from Thika to Nairobi.

The Origins of Nairobi

Nairobi, took over from Mombasa as the capital of Kenya in 1907, and was originally an uninhabited swamp and a watering hole that was previously used by the Maasai. The name Nairobi comes from the Maasai phrase 'Enkare Nyrobi' which translates to 'cool water' and became a depot of the Ugandan Railway line built by the British in 1899 which linked Mombasa to Uganda.

Nairobi now has an estimated population of over 5 million according to the 2022 census, from a mere 87,000 in the 1950s. It is one of the largest and most influential cities in Africa as an important commercial and financial hub for many international businesses and individuals. It is currently known to have over 1,000 major

international companies and organizations including the United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations office of Nairobi. It has a temperate climate due to its high elevation at a height of 5,889ft. It lies in the South-Central part of Kenya, has adequate water supply and is situated before the steep ascent of the Limuru escarpments. Did you know that Nairobi is the only city in the world that has its own National Park at its doorstep?



The position offered was in the said newly built estate, named Ofafa Maringo in a suburb of Nairobi, designed in 1957 and completed two years later in 1959. It was designated to accommodate young families coming to work in the metropolis. Up until 1939, the colonial government, guided by a policy of trusteeship, was instructed to provide only 'bachelor' housing for unaccompanied African men to limit

the number of Africans in urban areas. Ofafa Maringo was a new project and deemed 'posh' by its inhabitants as it had indoor plumbing and bathrooms. My position was that of a self-employed District Midwife of Nairobi supported by the City Council. The position came with a house, electricity, and running water, all paid for by my employers, along with all the medication I needed as part of my role caring for both mother and baby before and after delivery. My payment was to be taken care of by the family for each delivery completed. It was 40 shillings and covered seven days of visiting the mother and baby after birth.

This was deemed good money in those days and I was excited to take on the role. On register, I had 222 families who may have needed a midwife at any time. It sounded like a very good deal, but it turned out to be very strenuous undertaking. Obviously, the more deliveries one made, the more money one got but then the more exhausted one became. You had to be on call 24

hours a day and many babies arrived during the night as you were nodding off for a good night's sleep. You would get the husband or partner knocking on your door, begging you to go to see their wives as they believed they were about to give birth. You would walk to the house, carrying two bags, one for the mother, one for the baby and get there, to only find out the mother was not dilated enough and would not give birth for at least another 5 hours or more. So you had to go back home with your bags in case someone else knocked on the door and try to get some sleep. There was no day off and if you didn't work, you got no money.

Once you assisted in the delivery, your job was to visit them both for a total of 7 days; wash the baby and mothers clothes and bed sheets by hand, clean around them, give them medication if necessary and more. It was a much harder job than I had anticipated, and I hardly had time to myself. On top of that, you carried all the responsibility without the support of your

colleagues such as doctors and other midwives and were accountable for making the right decision regarding the two lives that were now in your hands. I lost a lot of weight during that time and knew that I could not carry on doing that job. I was there for just over a year and I knew I would become ill, if I continued with the work.

It was around that time, when young people started travelling outside of Kenya to study, especially to America and Canada. I became aware that I needed to improve my qualification and the future for me and my children, and therefore, started buying the 'Nursing Times and Nursing Standard' to respond to adverts.

I sent an application to as many positions as possible and some responded while others didn't. I mainly applied to America and England and eventually received a response from a hospital in the US and another one in the UK. After some thought, I decided to pursue the UK one as I felt

it would be better to go to the United Kingdom as Kenya already had a relationship with England and we were technically a British colony.

I got a response and was accepted. It was an amazingly exciting time! I was going to 'Ruraya' and may even meet the Queen, I thought, when I suddenly realized I had no money to cover the fare needed to travel and did not know how I was going to get the £50 for the flight. That was a lot off money in those days. How was I going to get to England? Where was I going to get the money from? I started to panic.

After a long search, a doctor by the name of Waiyaki, who was my GP at the time, introduced me to a lady by the name of Ruth Njiri, who was currently the secretary of the student's association and who lent me the money for the ticket which I promised pay back on my return. She lent me £55, £50 for the ticket and £5.00 for

pocket money. I managed to buy two dresses and two pairs of shoes and nothing more. Many of my colleagues thought I was stupid to leave the post and my children and go to a place I did not know, to study when I already had a good post that paid a reasonably good salary. They also thought I was too old, just over 30 and therefore would not be able to study and pass like other young girls, who were going abroad at the time. I had to leave my children with my family to look after; which was a very difficult and emotional decision for me. I felt divided between them and my ambition to better our lives but deep down, I knew I was making the right decision.

I took off in September 1960 on a VC10, a propeller airplane to London and I remember it being a very noisy and slow journey. It was an incredible experience, and I recall the plane making many stops on route, to refuel. I believe it took around 24 hours to get to London from Nairobi.



(Rosemarie – in the middle dressed like Queen Elizabeth just before she left for Ruraya!-UK)

The Swinging 60s

The 1960s was a time of rapid social, political and cultural change in Britain. London in particular was quickly becoming a Centre for fashion, music and Art. British pop culture suddenly exploded on the scene and was being exported around the world with leading groups such as The Beatles, and other minor groups

such as The Kinks and Small faces, to name but a few. There were also many popular female soloists such as Dusty Springfield, Shirley Bassey and Petula Clark. In the fashion world, designers and influencers such as Mary Quant popularized mini-skirts with models such as Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton being the icons of the day.



I was super excited, but also nervous and confused to be boarding an airplane for the first time in my life. While on the flight, I met an old school friend from Mathari called Eugenia who told me she was going to study nursing in a place called Peterborough. I told her I was going to do the same in Stockport, near Manchester. Well, we did not know the distances of these places or the geography of England, so we arranged to meet often during our lunch breaks, not knowing these two places were over 100 miles apart. It was wonderful to make contact with her.

Whilst on the flight, we spoke about our new adventure and the possibility of going to see where the Queen of England lived. I still recall the clothes The Queen wore on that day in Nyeri, when she climbed the rickety steps of Treetops; her white gloves, white hat, white shoes and a spotty can dress. She looked so beautiful and slim with a tiny waist. The thought that we may get to see her again was thrilling. So Eugenia and I decided that we would stop in London before going to Stockport and Peterborough and see Buckingham Palace. Eugenia knew someone in a place called Hampstead who put us up for the night, whilst we went to see the Palace. It was an exciting experience, and we loved every minute of it. We were walking on the streets of London, boarding the underground and looking up to these tall buildings everywhere. It felt like we were in a dream. We did not yet see the streets paved with gold, but that was not an issue. I do not remember how we did it, but when we got to Buckingham Palace, we saw the most enormous

house with, so many windows that we could not count. There were guards all over dressed in Black and Red uniforms with tall hats standing or sitting on horses. Our eyes could hardly take in all the sights. And From a mud hut in Nyeri to Buckingham Palace in London, was one of the most exciting days of my life. The following day, we took our prospective trains to our final destinations but of course never met during our lunch breaks!

My first experience of arriving in Stockport was how very grey the place was and although there was a little bit of sunshine, it was very cold for someone coming from a hot climate.. I only had a thin summer coat and dress and totally not dressed for the weather! I was nevertheless happy and excited to be in Ruraya (England), where I planned to stay for three years, get my qualifications and return home to my children.

Britain and the NHS

The 60s was also a time when Britain was experiencing a lot of changes in Law, Politics and Media, which were making Britain a more “liberal” and “permissive” society. This era also saw an influx of ‘immigrants’ arriving not only from Africa, but also from such places as India, and the Caribbean. Many of those who arrived then, met challenges that they had not envisaged, especially with housing. They had been looking to come to the ‘Motherland’ as they had been encouraged but found prejudice and rejections from some of the people. It was not unusual when looking for accommodation to find landlords with signs in their windows saying ‘No Blacks. No Irish. No Dogs.’

Although there were some amazing and compassionate people, these employment migrants had not been prepared for the racial insults and prejudice that they found and the Law had to be adjusted to respond to this reaction from the locals to protect those who came, invited and with high expectations of

bettering their lives and contributing to the motherland!’



Stepping Hill Hospital in Stockport was my first training hospital and I soon realized that my English was not as good as I thought. It was difficult to understand what was being said and everything had to be repeated two or three times for me to grasp! The Matron in charge arranged for guides to take us around and show us the hospital, including where we were going to stay. We had a couple of days' rest to get over the jetlag, recuperate and get to know our way round the hospital. Eventually, we were introduced to our ward where we were going to spend most of our time and given a senior nurse whom we shadowed as we learnt the routine and what was expected of us. After a while, we were given simple tasks to do and left on our own to carry them out.

Stepping Hill Hospital, first built in 1905 was initially a military hospital during the First World War and joined the NHS as Stepping Hill Municipal Hospital in 1948. This happened in good time because by 1961, the NHS had become Britain's largest employer and by 1968, had invited thousands of commonwealth workers to come, study and work as hospital staff. It is recorded that one third of its student nurses and midwives roles were filled by Commonwealth migrants mainly from the Caribbean and a minority from Africa. The Caribbean was a primary source of nurses as early as 1949, when a campaign was launched by the Health and Labour ministries to recruit thousands of nurses from all over the Commonwealth. Many of the Caribbean workers, especially Jamaica boarded the now famous Windrush Ship and landed in the Uk as early as 1948. Africans came later, mainly from Ghana and Kenya.

As I was already a Midwife, the Matron decided to put me in the gynecological ward where I stayed for about three months before moving on to other wards. I was put to work almost straight away and worked very long hours with only three days off per month. That's right, three days per month. Our wages amounted to £11.00 per month with full board and I had to send half of it back home to look after my children. It was hard but I wanted to get the training, so that I could get my qualifications and go back to my family. I did not come all the way there to work, but to train and knew that there was an inset day for nurse training, called PTS and therefore I waited to be called.

Well, the first three months went by, and I did not start the training. The next bunch of students started training in the next three months and again I did not see my name on the list. I started to wonder why this was happening, but rationalized that the matron wanted me to get accustomed to the country and the way of working before putting me on putting my name

up. This went on for some time and when the next three months came by and I was not called up for training, I got frustrated and angry, so I went to her and asked her when she would be putting me up for the training and she made some excuses and promised that she would put me on the next course. Well, the next course came and nothing happened.



(Rosemarie - a few years after arriving in the UK)

Racism and discrimination was the universal experience of health workers migrating to the UK, especially around training and career opportunities. Many nurses who came over

expecting to achieve the internationally recognized State Registered nursing qualification (SRN), which would have allowed them to return home and gain employment and therefore a better state of living, faced unexpected challenges. Because of the discrimination and unfair treatment they suffered by those in charge, many were forced or even duped into taking the State Enrolled Nursing qualification (SEN), rather the more prestigious and highly valued SRN qualification they sought. The SEN qualification not being internationally recognized meant that the overseas nurses were limited in their option of returning home (Policy paper by Stephanie Snow, Emma Jones 08 March 2011 - History and Politics).

My training placement was not forthcoming and this went on for nearly two years when I finally had enough. I decided to confront the matron about it and made it clear that I had not come to the UK to work but to train and get back to my

children. She knew I had left my post and had come only for the training and therefore could not understand why she was behaving that way. Unfortunately, when I said I would leave if she did not put me up for training, she turned nasty. She became abusive and aggressive, telling me that she would send me back to Africa if that's what I wanted to happen. I made it clear to her that she could not do so that as I was a British Subject and had a right to be there. She was annoyed that I argued back and stood my ground. She retorted, "We shall see who will win; you or I". I left feeling angry and frustrated, disorientated and confused.

I was desperate and unsure as what to do. I remember walking around the city deep in thought about my situation and what I could do about it that I nearly got knocked over by a car as I crossed a road. I sat down on the pavement and knew something had to be done but did not know what or who to turn to as I knew no one in the whole country.

In desperation, I reached out to someone and, got a contact from Kenya who told me about a fellow nurse called Roxanna Waiyaki who trained with me in Pumwani Hospital, Nairobi and was now in Hare field Hospital Uxbridge, Middlesex. I immediately got in touch with her, gave a month's notice at Stockport and went to stay with Roxanna.

Many of the subjects, who came to Britain to assist with the growing staffing crisis across the healthcare profession, experienced discrimination and racism in all areas including finding decent housing. This sometimes pushed them to apply for courses for which they were overqualified and work in professions that they did not intend on going for.

Did you know that the first black woman on the entire continent of Africa to be licensed as a nurse was Cecilia Makiwane of South Africa, who completed her programme on January 7th 1908. She was born in 1880 in Eastern Cape.

Her father was a teacher and a minister and so she was taught at home before she even entered school.

I arrived in Harefield, where Roxanna was training and resided in her nurses' quarters room for a while to recuperate, gathering my thoughts as what to do next. I wasn't prepared to go back home without my qualification. That was a No No! Roxanna, obviously was not allowed to have visitors stay in her room, but she wanted to help me and therefore hid me all the time, sneaking me food as I did not have any money to buy my own. She did this by hiding it under her nurse's cape and bringing it to me. We would sit quietly in her room thinking and planning what I could do next.

One of her friends who knew about me being there suggested that I apply for training in that hospital and tell the Sister Tutor I had just arrived from Kenya as I did not want the previous matron at Stepping Hill Hospital to

follow me up with a negative reference. Previously, I had applied to many hospitals but always got a rejection from all of them. I believe that she gave me a bad reference each time I made an application, and it would therefore be rejected or declined.

In desperation, I made the application to Harefield Hospital and everything went smoothly. I took the test, passed and was accepted. I trained for the first three months without a problem and passed all the exams. The sister Tutor was very pleased with me as I was a very hard working trainee and our relationship was excellent. Well, I felt good and happy that I had got rid of that awful experience in Stockport and I would now do exactly what I came here to do.

One day, the Sister Tutor commanded me into her office and I sensed something was wrong. She informed me that she was not prepared to train a liar. I was flabbergasted and confused.

Little did I know there was such a thing as a National Insurance Number and that it had followed me there showing that I had worked elsewhere and I was not a new comer to the country. The sister Tutor did not wait for me to explain but dismissed me straight away! When I asked what the National Insurance Number was, She got angry and just told me to get out. I was crying and terribly distraught and muddled yet again! I approached the matron of the hospital to see if she could help me, but although she had a very good report about my work ethics, she informed me she could not help me on the side of training as she was not a tutor. She could only give me a job, which I did not really want, as I had only come for training and not work. I had no option but to take the job for a while and think about what to do next.

Whilst there, I got a good suggestion from someone. They told me about a Minister in charge of the overseas students by the name of Lady Coston, whose office was in the Houses of

Parliament. They advised me to go and see her and tell her all my problems and see if she could help me. So I wrote her a letter and she asked me to make an appointment to go and see her. Well, I had never been on the underground in London and was not sure how to get there. So I gave myself enough time to get lost until I finally found the Houses of Parliament and went straight to her office.

I walked into a very nice, posh office and was received by her secretary, who asked me to wait in the reception. Lady Coston was a very smart and kind woman, who welcomed me warmly, greeting me with a smile and directing me into her office. As soon as I open I walked in, I began to cry, worried that she may not be able to help me, thinking that this could be my last chance and I may have to return to Kenya not having obtained what I came for. Deep down, I was adamant that would not be the case and hoped and prayed through the tears. As English as she was, she asked me to sit down and asked her secretary to make me a cup of tea to help

calm me down. She said, ‘take your time’, as I sat down with tears rolling down my face.

After a while, I started to feel better and once I calmed down, Lady Coston came and sat next to me and said, ‘What can I do for you? How can I help you?’ I told her my whole story; how I had come from Kenya and how I had left my children with my mother and brother Moses to come to England to train as a nurse. I told her about my negative experience in Stepping Hill Hospital and how unkind the matron was to me; how she was taking advantage of overseas students by getting them to work instead of putting them on the training programme. I explained that I left the hospital for this reason and had no option but to lie to the Tutor at Harefield Hospital. I explained to the kind Lady Coston that a negative reference must have followed me every time I applied to a hospital for training and was now so desperate, hence lying of my status to Harefield hospital.

Lady Coston listened to my story with sympathy, kindness and understanding. She felt sorry for me that I had left my children to try and better our lives and that I had had such an awful experience. After some thought, she finally said that from that day onwards, I should not mention that matron in any of my applications but should give her name as the referee. I was so taken back by her compassion and so relieved that I cried again; this time with such happiness. With this information, I only applied to one hospital, and I was accepted straight away.

This was Finchley Memorial Hospital in North London, and it is where I finally started my training. I was elated, over the moon and I have never ever forgotten the kindness and empathy of Lady Coston. This incident showed me that although there were some unkind people, there were also others who had a good heart.

The Finchley Memorial Hospital was opened on 28th May 1908 and was originally established as the Finchley Cottage Hospital with around 20 beds. It is now an NHS service Community Hospital still relatively small with 56 beds and two wards. Presently it has now been converted to a very large hospital.

I arrived here in 1964 and trained for two years and got my first certificate, which was EN (Enrolled Nurse qualification. This was over three years after arriving in England. I should have been preparing to return to my children by then. Anyway, I went on to do the RGN qualification (known then as State Registered Nurse) SRN, at the Hertford County Hospital in Hertfordshire, which took another three years. After that I went to Edgware General Hospital in Middlesex, where I trained as a State Registered Midwife for a year in 1968. Finally, I did one more qualification to specialize as a Family Planning Practitioner in Tottenham Court Road at the Marie Stopes Private Clinic. I finally felt

ready to fill in that little red case that was sarcastically given to me when I left Kenya. Some jealous or unkind individuals gave it to me, asking me to fill it with my certificates when I came back. Well, I now could!

I now felt ready to go back to my children but did not have enough money to pay for my fare back. I applied to three hospitals in Kenya, Kenyatta, Nairobi (called European hospital then) and Aga Khan Hospital and they all accepted me. They offered to pay my fare back but fortunately someone advised me not to accept the offer as it meant being bound in contract for two whole years. They would also have the power to send me where they desired and I would have to do whatever they wanted me to do, if they paid my fare. I did not like this idea and therefore decided to work for a little while as an agency nurse and pay my own fare back. I worked for about 6 months and saved enough more for the ticket. I couldn't wait to see my children, as well as my mother and other family members.



Rosemary during her training in the UK

Hospitals in Kenya in late 1960s

Kenyatta Hospital was founded in 1901 as the Native Civil Hospital with a bed capacity of 40. It was renamed as the King George VI hospital in 1952 and it is now again known as Kenyatta Hospital. It is the oldest and largest hospital in Kenya and a chief teaching and research centre with thousands of patients from Kenya and across Africa. Its present bed capacity is around 2,400 beds, with an inpatient attendance of over

900,000 and an outpatient attendance of over 800,000 annually. In 1970, it had a bed capacity of 1,800, 6000 staff, 50 wards, 22 outpatient clinics and 24 operating theatres.

Nairobi hospital was officially opened in 1954 as an exclusive European-only hospital, as Kenya was then a colony of the United Kingdom. It started serving Africans on October 19th, 1961 and then the name was changed to Nairobi Hospital. It is renowned for emergency and trauma care, disaster response and critical care.

The Aga Khan Hospital is under the leadership of the Aga Khan IV, the 49th Imam of Nizari Ismailis. He is a business magnate with British and Portuguese citizenship and a racehorse owner and breeder. He grew up in Nairobi and took over Imamate from his grandfather the Aga Khan III. The Hospital was established in 1958 as a private non-profit institution that offers general medical, specialist and diagnostic services with a capacity of 254 beds.

I arrived in Kenya in 1969, 9 years after I left my home and my children. I was met at the airport by so many people, I could hardly believe it. They came in bus loads and cars; the young, the old and even the infirm. It was amazing and everyone was so excited to see me, as many people who went abroad did not return, at least for years on end.

How things had changed as the country was now independent. There were some good and bad things but I was very excited to be back in the country of my birth and to be able to see my family again. I had originally planned to be away for about 5 years maximum, but it had taken 9 years due to the challenges that I encountered. The good things I found were that people were much better educated, and they looked very smart and proud. I was impressed with that and the fact we were now an independent country.

Kenya gets independent!

This was in 1969, the year that Kenya held a general election on Dec 6th; it's first since gaining independence in 1963. President Jomo Kenyatta was the leader of Kenya African National Union (KANU), the only party in the country, making it effectively a one party state which subsequently meant that Kenyatta was re-elected as president without a single vote! The population of the country was now over 11 million, while it had been a mere 7.8 million in 1960.



The most negative aspect that I found depressing was the bribery that had consumed the country. Even to get a job that you have gained qualifications for, you had to bribe. I was also upset to notice that a lot of greenery had disappeared and the trees that I enjoyed during

my childhood had been cut down and not replaced. I could not at times recognize where I was! The roads and infrastructure had also been neglected, and roads had potholes and had not been repaired but some of the new buildings were beautiful and very modern.

Out of the three hospitals that accepted me, I chose to work at the Aga Khan Hospital as Staff Nurse. I got around £850 per year! Unfortunately, I did not enjoy working there as I was given a much lower position than my qualifications. I found that they treated me unfairly and wanted me to be of a subordinate position below even those with lower qualifications than myself. It was soul destroying after so many years struggling to achieve what I had and being away from my family for so long. This was disappointing as I had been looking forward to going back and working in my home country, bringing new skills and knowledge. I stayed there for less than six months as I found the discrimination from the

Asians against the Africans was too much for me to bear.

I decided to contact my second option, Nairobi Hospital, and gave them a call. They were very pleased to hear from me and invited me to join them straight away. Their pay was slightly better at £1,000 per year. I was also given a better post as a ward sister in McMillan Ward, which was in accordance with my qualifications. After settling down for a while, I found that the salary did not take me very far in the newly independent country. It could not cover all my children's school fees, living accommodation and I could not afford to run a car.

The most upsetting thing was the fact that I was unable to afford to rent my own accommodation and have my children stay with me. I first had to stay with a friend, with whom I later fell out with due to one of my children breaking something small in her home. My friend Roxanna, who

was back in the country like me, again, saved me. She allowed me to stay in her one-bedroom flat in Nairobi, which she shared with her daughter. We slept together in her bed while her daughter slept in the front room on the couch and when Roxanna's boyfriend came to stay, I shared the floor with her daughter. The fact that I had been away from my children for so many years and I now could not be with them in the same house when they came home on holiday from boarding school, really upset me. I therefore decided to go back to England and take my children with me.

A set of new challenges that I had not envisioned, awaited me. Just to get my children's passports was a big task as everyone wanted a bribe to do a simple service of producing a passport for them. They assumed I had a lot of money because I came from the UK but little did they know I could hardly afford to live and pay my own rent! Luckily, I knew some influential people who went to school with me.

Even though the passports had been produced and were waiting for me to collect in the Government office, the officials in charge would not hand them over to me until I bribed them. This is called 'Kitu kidogo - which in swahili means 'something small '. Well I had no money to do that and to be quite honest I did agree with the idea of bribery. So I got in touch with one former schoolmate by the name of Mr. Ignus Nderi, who was now a top CID in Nairobi. I also went to see another former schoolmate who was now Governor of the Bank of Kenya Duncan Ndegwa, and with both their influence, I managed to get the passports. It was not what I intended to do but was left no choice.

I had been to the passport office on many occasions and every time, the official would tell me that the documents were not ready. He asked me to hand over something if I wanted things to go quickly and smoothly. Somehow he had found out that I had a plot in Thika and kept on saying that I had come from the UK and should

have enough money to buy him ‘a tea’ (chai in Swahili, meaning to bribe him) and that is why I enlisted the help of my two influential friends. First Duncan Ndegwa phoned the passport office himself and demanded that I be given the passports, and I can only imagine how the official must have been shaking in his boots when he found out who was on the other end of the phone. When I went to pick up the passports, I was worried that he might change his mind, so I asked my other friend, Senior CID Ignus Nderi to accompany me. We drove in his official car, with a driver, and he stayed in the car while me and the driver went into the office. Nderi told his driver to ask the official to give him an answer regarding the issue of the passports; just a yes or no, to the question, whether he would give me the passports or not.

Well, when we walked into the office and the driver informed the official that Mr. Nderi was sitting in the car outside and wanted an answer to the question, the official could hardly stand up.

He repeated, 'Who did you say was in the car outside and what did he say?' He could not believe it and he stuttered to say, yes of course, yes of course I will give her the passports!' When the driver went back to the car, the official looked at me with such anger, saying 'Why did you have to bring all these people to get your passports.' It was not necessary he said and I just looked at him without flinching. He could not believe I knew such prominent people and could call on them and knew he could lose his job straight away if he didn't do as asked. Furiously, he went upstairs and came back with the three passports that I had been waiting for all this time and handed them to me with a contemptuous look. The passports had been ready for a long time.

I finally came back to the UK in 1971 with my middle son, Paul (Bro). I have never believed it to be a good idea for a whole family to travel in one airplane. So John and Wanjiru followed us with a few months between them. We were now

reunited in the UK (Ruraya) and lived together in one house in Croydon, South London.

UK in the 70s and the Miners Strike!

The 1970s in Great Britain kicked off with the Dockers Strike and continued to witness soaring inflation, political upheaval that saw high gas prices, the oil crisis, a range of strikes, power cuts and even declared State of Emergencies. 1972 saw the decade's first NHS strike involving 97,000 employees in an industrial action, and of course the famous coal miners strikes that started in the 70s through to the 90s and epitomized the struggle of the working class miners with the government of the time with regards to their pay. It was a time of Trade Unions and the end of the protracted Vietnam War that began in 1955 and ended in April 1975.

In contrast, the 70s also epitomized the disco craze of such groups as Abba, Bee Gees and Donna Summer. Roller disco parties were a big hit with fans dressed in Bell bottoms (wide

legged trousers), and frayed jeans. Women moved from the miniskirts of the 60s to dressing in midi skirts and maxi dresses. Hippie outfits of chokers (necklaces), headbands and jewellery made of wood, stones and feathers were a big hit at the times. Both men and women loved to step out in platform shoes that got higher and higher, with oversized glasses and clothes often made in denim, corduroy and suede were the fashion statement of the day.

It was the time of the Jackson Five, The Commodores, Diana Ross, Steve Wonder and Smokey Robinson, all emerging out of the Motown Record Label in America. They brought worldwide hits that changed the face of music immensely. Children's toys were epitomized by Space Hoppers and Raleigh chopper bikes and spent their time playing outdoors as there were no electronics. Households became proud owners of the Record Player and cassette recorder and enjoyed driving round in the latest Ford Cortina.

In the political arena, Edward Heath was the Prime Minister of the day, from 1970 to 1974, taken over by James Callaghan from 1974 - 1976. The decade ended with Margaret Thatcher, becoming the first female prime minister of the country in 1979.



Coming back to England, though exciting, had its own trials and tribulations and I was starting a whole new life, this time with three children and we had to get to know each other properly. The eldest, John was 17 years old, Paul (who we called 'Bro') was 14 and Wanjiru (who was known as Jean then) was a mere 11 years old. They were all becoming or were teenagers. I joined my friend, Jim, in his flat on Lodge Road, West Croydon and it worked out well to start with and I was happy about that because we

could all get to know each other and enjoy each other's company.

As mentioned, it was a joy to be together in the beginning but the flat was quite small, and we did our best not to get into each other's way. Sadly, our interactions soon started going downhill and I noticed that my friend was not quite happy sharing space with my children. Looking back, it probably was due to the fact that he did not have children of his own around him and suddenly he acquired an instant family of two teenage children with their own needs. My youngest had not yet joined us. So he started complaining about every little thing and by the time my last child, Wanjiru, came over, I decided to leave his flat and get my own place, which fortunately happened to be just round the corner from where he lived. I told him that he needed to accept my children if we were to live together as he already knew I had them when we met, but I thought it was best to move anyway.

I was lucky to get a place that I could afford, consisting of two rooms, one on the ground floor and one on the third floor. We used my room on the ground floor, to eat, to sit, and to store food and shared a kitchen with three other families as well as the bathroom and toilet. It was not easy, especially the cooking and bathing arrangements. My daughter slept with me and the boys shared a room with one bed. It was a tight squeeze for the four of us who were trying not only to get to know each other, but to come to terms with living in a completely different culture and society.

As soon as the children arrived, I started work as an agency nurse to keep paying the bills and applied to the National Health Service for a post as Night Sister in Waddon Hospital, Croydon. I eventually got the post which paid me around £2,000 per year and was quite pleased with my achievement. Not being able to afford new clothes, I frequently visited secondhand shops and one in particular was my favorite as it had

good quality clothes and I had become friendly with a kind lady by the name of Jean Payant. Jean introduced me to her husband, Mr. Payant and they both helped me with essential information such as the best GP to go to, among other things and where to buy reasonably priced items. Through talking to them both and sharing my housing problems, Mr. Payant gave me a proposition that I could not refuse. He said that if I was willing to become a caretaker, he had accommodation above an elderly Day Centre which we as a family could take care of and in return, get the accommodation for free. It was a two-bedroom space with its own kitchen, sitting room and bathroom. I was ecstatic and immediately agreed to take it.

Our new home was in an imposing double-fronted detached house on Elmwood Road, West Croydon, locally known as Broad Green. Our job as a family was to clean the space downstairs in the evening, three days a week, after it was used by the elderly for games such as bingo. (A

fun game enjoyed by all) We had to mop the floors, wash the cups and get it ready for the next day's activities. A lot of people smoked cigarettes in those days, even the elderly and there were cigarette butts everywhere. It was not a pleasant job to do and I believe my children did not enjoy it at all but it helped us and me especially to save money. Perhaps, being teenagers, they were disappointed that they had come all this way to be cleaning other peoples' floors. On the other hand, I was very happy that I had good accommodation that I did not have to pay for and there was sufficient space for all of us to live in without having to share amenities. I now had the task of getting the children into the local schools; something that was completely new to me and am not sure how I managed to do it but I did, perhaps with the help of Paul and Jean Payant.

It was a challenging time for all of us; getting to know each other and the children adjusting to schools, a different culture and society. I had got used to being on my own after spending 9 years

getting my qualifications and now I had to be a mother and father to three young people. When I left Kenya, the youngest child, Wanjiru was only two and a half years old, Paul (Bro) was 4 years old and John was 7 years old. They were now all teenagers or near enough and had to get used to a mother whom they had not seen for so long and whom they knew only from photographs and what people told them about her. They had to adjust to an alien way of life, so different from what they knew, including food, school, general social life, culture and the weather whilst all at the same time, making new friends as teenagers. Even though they spoke English, it was still difficult as there were not many other Kenyans or families such as uncles and aunties to help them navigate these new territories and challenges. It was just me and them and we surely had our trials!

It was around this time that I decided I wanted to have my own house, where we could be free to do as we pleased. Where my children could do what they wanted; run up and down the stairs or

be as noisy as they wanted to be without anyone telling them off. I therefore took on three jobs to save enough money for a deposit. I worked as a full-time ward sister in NHS Croydon group hospital *and* did three nights in a private nursing home. *Plus* being a caretaker in Elmwood road. That's one full-time job and two part-time jobs. I was determined to get the money necessary for a deposit of a house, which meant we did not go on holiday of any sort. Getting a roof over our head was more important than a holiday and I therefore saved as much as I could but it was still not enough for a deposit.

To purchase our first home, I had to borrow from four other people to make up the total amount required before being considered for a mortgage. I approached my English friend, Ruth Stanley and another friend by the name of Bill Wilkinson and again contacted my beloved sister Wangui, who was very wealthy by this time. She did not let me down. Together I made up the required deposit of £2,500 for my first property which

was being sold for £7,500. It was a lot of money in those days but I was determined to purchase it. The house belonged to an old Jamaican man, who was planning to go back home for his retirement. It consisted of four bedrooms, three receptions, a bathroom and toilet. 67 Nova Road, Croydon, South London became our first real home and me and my children were happy there. We had many Jamaican families as neighbors and the children, John, Paul and Jean went through their teenage years in this neighborhood as I continued to work hard for my next venture. That was in 1972.

Croydon in the 1970s

Croydon in South London is one of the largest commercial districts in Greater London even today It has an extensive shopping district and night time economy, which includes cinemas and public houses. Historically it was an ancient parish and at the time of the Norman conquest. Croydon had a church, a mill and around 365

inhabitants, as recorded in the Domes Day Book of 1086 (a manuscript record of the ‘Great Survey’ of much of England and parts of Wales ordered by King William I). By the early 20th Century, Croydon had become an industrial area, known for car manufacture, metal working and Croydon Airport. Later, Croydon grew to become a retailing Centre and had massive redevelopment which saw the rise of office blocks and the famous Whitgift Centre. Did you know that the Whitgift Centre was the largest shopping Centre in Greater London until 2008 and that Croydon Airport was at one time the UK’s only international airport? Opened in 1920, it was developed as Britain’s main airport, handling more cargo, mail and passengers than any other UK airport at the time. It closed in 1959.



The four-bedroom house on Nova Road, West Croydon was spacious with large rooms and a

large garden with an outside toilet. My sons shared a bedroom, whilst my daughter had her own room. I felt it was a good idea to rent out two rooms to help pay the mortgage as I was a single mother and my wage had to cover everything from food, clothes, gas and electricity to name a few costs. My children were now also full-blown teenagers with desires and interests of their own and required assistance to buy certain items.

They wanted to integrate with other children, as teenagers do and find acceptance in a foreign land. I am sure it was not easy for them and that they had to navigate many challenges of growing up. So, I rented out two rooms to a Mr. and Mrs. Santos, a mature couple from Portugal who were migrant workers. That income was enough to pay for the mortgage leaving me to use my wages for other expenditures. We were contented to a degree as we had lots of space to ourselves and to have friends around.

I made one of the three reception rooms downstairs into my bedroom and we therefore, used one reception room and a dining room to relax in and watch our black and white TV. The kitchen was small, but it had a pantry to store food and an outside toilet. The garden was large and my children were able to play and have friends come to visit them. This was the beginning of a new life in England for us all and for me personally, got more confident about what I wanted to do next.

I continued working two jobs as I was now inspired to purchase another property. Doing this, allowed me to save my hospital wage for the deposit and we lived on the money earned working in a private Nursing Home in South Croydon, called Verecroft. I worked there for three nights a week and paid £5.00 per a night. I calculated that £5.00 would go to income tax and the rest and £10.00 was designated to purchase food for the family for the week.

Eventually I was able to save enough deposits for my second purchase and acquired a house in Fairlands Avenue, Thornton Heath, a stone throw from West Croydon off the main road, towards Central London. That was in 1975. This property was smaller but in a smarter area than Nova Road. My idea was to rent out Nova road and to get enough funding to pay the mortgage and have some extra to help for the new house. The idea worked very well, and we moved to Fairlands Avenue. This move enabled me to stop working two jobs and was able to concentrate on my main job as a Ward Sister in Waddon Hospital. It also gave me time to think and rest to gather my thoughts and ideas for the next venture. Within a year, I began to plan what to do next. By now, I was getting fed up with being employed and working for someone else and dreamt of having a business of my own.

Although I was now not working privately anymore, I sometimes had the opportunity of working in a care home for extra cash, which as

a qualified nurse I had to run almost entirely by myself. The owner did not have nursing qualifications, and I reckoned that if she could run a home without being qualified medically, I could do the same and even better as I had qualifications. The prospect of being self-employed scared me totally and I sought encouragement from my sister, Wangui in Kenya. She of course said, 'you can do it'! Yes, you can be your own boss, why not, she retorted in her bulshy outspoken self confident self that she was! That gave me courage and encouragement.

So after another year, I made up my mind that I would purchase my own nursing business and therefore started looking for a suitable enterprise. I registered with two estate agents in the area who sold care homes for the elderly. In the duration of one year, I viewed many homes; some were good; some bad; some too far away and others way too expensive for me. I wanted something near where I lived and so, continued to looking.

Eventually a business came up in Norbury, a few kilometers away from where we lived. It was called 'Rest Home for the Elderly'. As soon as I saw it, I was excited because of its proximity to me and the fact that it was within my price range. I contacted the estate agent who warned me that the care home had lost its license due to the owner not fulfilling her obligations and keeping up with regulations. It had been originally registered for 16 residents but due to the owner not keeping up the standards, the Authorities refused her accepting more residents and the number had reduced to 10 residents only! The Local Authority were waiting for home to become empty, so that they could close it down. The estate agent asked me if I really wanted to purchase it but warned me that there would be a lot of work to be done before I could get the license back and that I needed to spend a lot of money to bring it up to scratch. The business was made up of two properties with 12 rooms and a couple of reception rooms and the purchase price was just over £36,000. I was nervously excited!

Norbury and its History

The name Norbury comes from North Burh (North Borough), due to its position on the northern boundary of the former Manor of Croydon, but there are other disputes that it takes its name from a split in the borough of Bensham, and is one of the former seven boroughs of Croydon. For most of its history, Norbury was rural countryside through which the London to Brighton Way Roman Road passed. The road passes through Streatham and Croydon, then through the Caterham Valley gap in the North Downs. By the early 13th Century, Norbury was a sub-manor within the chief manor of Croydon and at the start of the Victorian period, the population of Norbury consisted of fifty-six people and three main dwellings; the Hermitage, Norbury Manor Farm House and Norbury Hall. By 1900, Norbury had become an affluent semi-rural suburb boasting two golf courses and cricket, football, tennis and bowls clubs. The Norbury Fire Station was built to replace nearby Streatham Fire Station.

As of today, Norbury is a built-up residential area housing a diverse and multicultural community. It has a variety of local commerce, with most of the high street consisting of newsagents and various independent businesses as well as several pubs and restaurants. With Norbury Station in fare zone 3, Norbury is well connected to other local areas, such as Crystal Palace, Croydon, Streatham and Central London.



Although nervous, I was happy to take on this Care Home as I saw the potential of making it into a successful business if given half the chance. It was in a clean residential town and situated on a wide road, very close to the main London Road, where I could get groceries and with plenty of transport options. So, I made up my mind to take on the challenge and make it work. I had to sell the property on Nova Road to get the funds necessary to purchase the business

on Stanford Road. Nova Road went for £17,000 and I gave back £7,000 to the lenders and put the rest up as a deposit for the business, which I called Roselands Residential Home.

It was not until I fully took over the business that I realized what a terrible state of disrepair it was in. There was so much work to do that was not apparent at first glance. Windows were broken everywhere; there were holes in walls in many rooms. The kitchen was in the worst state, with holes on the floor that one could fall throw into the cellar below. There were rats everywhere in the kitchen, a health hazard, especially in a home for the elderly. The residents' rooms had not been decorated in years and the whole place had an awful musty. Where there were carpets, they smelt of urine and were threadbare. The residents were not cared for properly and sat down or lay in their beds with no one to keep them entertained. It was an awful sight and very sad indeed. I do not know how the owner got away with it and it was not surprising that the authorities wanted to close it down.

When I took over the business, I went to see Mr. Davis, the Local Authority man in charge of care homes in the area, who told me categorically that I would not get a license until the work to bring it up to standard was complete. He asked me how I thought I could do better than the previous owner, Mrs. Hall who had been there for years. "What makes you think you can do it if Mrs. Hall failed?" he curiously questioned me. As I continue to insist that I could, he conceded and said he would give me the chance to try to revive it, but made it clear he could not allow me to have more residents until he was satisfied with the improvements.

I took the chance and my work started on day one! I was the cook, the nurse, the decorator and night nurse, all at once. I could not afford to employ any more staff as the income was too low and the cost of running it high. I worked 29 days and had one day off every month and on

that day I went shopping in a local supermarket. My day would consist of cooking and serving food and in between I would take a paint brush and start some decoration in the empty rooms. Once the residents were in bed, I would continue with the decoration in any other rooms for at two hours. I was also on night duty and had to sometimes get up, up to 4 times a night to help frail residents with toileting or anything else they required. It was the hardest I had ever worked apart from my work as a district midwife in Ofafa Maringo, Nairobi. In retrospect, I believe that must have been a preparation for what was to come. It is said, that God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.

Within a year, the home was backing up and running. The Authorities came to see it and were so surprised at the improvements. I had all the windows replaced, the holes covered up, and the mice or should I say rats removed. Whatever I could not do, I borrowed some money to get experts to deal with. The income was low as the

residents only paid £30 per week while other homes had fees of up to £60. My highest paying resident was Mr. Pitt, who paid a whopping £42.00 per week! When Mr. Davis came, his jaw dropped and could not do otherwise me a full license when he saw what I had done. He acknowledged my hard work and congratulated me on my achievement. He jokingly said, "It is beautiful, very nice! You worked very hard! You worked like a black, he said jokingly, then he turned slowly to me and said, "Oh, I forgot you are black." He had a dark sense of humor like many English people and I just laughed along with him.

I was very happy and more relaxed now that I had a full license, but my work continued with the same fervor as before. I was able to have a minimal staff; a cook, a cleaner and two carers, whilst I covered all other areas of work, including night duty. I was still working 29 days out of 30 every month and going shopping on my day off! I steadily filled the home to

capacity and was then able to employ other carers. The home was becoming popular as local people heard about the improvements that I had made.

I invited my mother in 1980, to come over to 'Ruraya' for the first time, to come and stay with me. She was so surprised to see that the daughter, whom she thought was terribly lazy, had achieved so much and was so hard-working. She could not believe her eyes what I had achieved. I promptly gave her the job of peeling potatoes for the residents' meals, which she was magnificent at and that helped me a lot as I could not afford workers. We did everything we could, from cleaning to caring; from painting to gardening and everything else between. Other people, such as my friend Mary Wangui and my sister Christine Wangeci came on holiday but whilst there, helped me with some of the work needed. It was not a holiday for them, but they did not mind as they saw what I was trying to achieve. It was soon after this time that I met

my second husband, Harry Morton and got married in 1982!

As I settled down more, an opportunity to purchase the house next door, 6 Stanford road came up as the family were relocating to Australia. I now had the business at number 8 and 10 and my private home at number 6. I was in a much better place and pleased about my achievements but I still wanted to move forward and see what else I could do. I continued looking at other business ventures in the care sector and went to almost every county that sent me details; from Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Essex, practically, all the counties surrounding London.

CANTERBURY AND BEYOND

I never really liked the countryside but my new husband had been raised in one and we often went on trips there at any opportunity.

A business opportunity came up in Kent which my husband and I went to see, and we liked. It was a grade II listed house standing on its own grounds. It was a very large house called The Barham House Nursing Home and was very stately looking and beautiful with large bay windows and beautiful gardens.

Initially, I was excited about it but my husband was particularly keen on it. After some thought and inspection, I realized that though magnificent, it wasn't going to make a good business proposition, and I had many reasons to support my perspective. Firstly, it was in a very small village that had only one school, one church, one pub and a post office. I rationalized that it would be very difficult to get and maintain

staff from the local community, and they had to come from further out.

The nearest village was Elsham, an old mining village a few miles away with very bad transportation links. I saw the problems that this would cause, and shared it with my newlywed husband, whose heart was set on it and very disappointed to say the least that I did not want to go ahead with the purchase. This nearly caused us to get divorced in an early marriage. Eventually we went ahead with the purchase and as I had predicted, it gave us a lot of headaches. The staff had to be ferried by Taxi from Elsham every day, which had to be paid for. It was also difficult to get residents from nearby villages and many other potential residents did not want to go there as it was in the middle of nowhere with very little transport facilities.

A Home in the Country!

Barham is a rural village and a civil parish (a type of administrative parish used for local

government; a territorial designation, which is the lowest tier of local government) in the City of Canterbury, approximately 10 km south-east of Canterbury and 13 km north of Folkestone. Its name was formerly spelt Bioraham in 799, which was Biora taken from the name of Saxon chief, and Ham meaning settlement or homestead. Barham village has its own C of E primary school, a village hall with bowls club attached and The Street, the village green sports field, the Duke of Cumberland public house and a Care Home (The Barham Nursing Home). It is close to the A road between Canterbury and Dover. At the southeast part of the parish is Barham Crematorium, opened in 1956 and which continues to be used by local people from far and wide as a place to say goodbye to their loved ones!

I struggled with this business for around 15 years, way too long. I put in a lot of money and hard work to bring it up to my standard and satisfy the local authority's demands. Harry and

I lived upstairs in the owners' accommodation, but it meant that I had to sell Roselands Residential Home in London in order to have enough money to modernize it. Barham was registered for 25 nursing residents, but I never ever managed to make it full. I was the matron of the home and had nursing sisters including Mrs. Sue Williams, who later became the matron as I moved on to new ventures.

Barham Nursing Home was a Grade II listed house, a beautiful home with spacious rooms and corridors but none of the rooms were ensuite, except one. I knew this would later be a problem as the care industry was changing, and more and more people were looking for ensuite rooms, although most were unable to use them due to mobility issues. I was not very good with paperwork and nor was Sue Williams, so I decided to approach my sister in law, Mary, who was a retired teacher to assist us. She subsequently became the manager but insisted on bringing her mother with as she happened to be

her main carer. Her mother, Mrs. Morton lived in Barham House Nursing Home for 7 years free of Charge until she passed away.

Even with all this, I was miserable being in the countryside. I was used to the city but in contrast, my husband, Harry, was very happy living in a small village. I decided then that I was not going to stay there and would look for another business in a location that was more suitable to my sensibility. I again approached an estate agent by the name of Gillian & Highland who sold businesses including care homes. I had previously bought Roseland Care Home from them. They were the ones who later sold it for me and it is from them that I bought Barham House Nursing Home and who later sold it on for me as well. I therefore had a very good relationship with them and was confident in their buying and selling skills.

Gillian and Highland informed me about a local business called The Red House Hotel that

they had on their books and I went to get a sneak preview of it from the outside. I was impressed with what I saw and realized straightaway that the building had much more potential for expansion as well as other considerations due to its location and the grounds it sat on. It was surrounded by three housing estates which I knew would give me the staff that I needed and would eliminate the problem I encountered in Barham. It was not far from the city Centre, and had ample parking space, good transport facilities as well as being close to the main motorway (M2) from Canterbury to London.

The Historical City of Canterbury

Canterbury, a local government district with City status is north to the coastal towns of Whitstable and Herne Bay and was formed on 1 April 1974 by the merging of the City with the Whitstable and Herne Bay Urban Districts and

the Bridge-Blean Rural District. Canterbury has its origins in the Roman settlement of 'Durovernum Cantiacorum', which was established in the first century AD after the Roman invasion of 43 AD, The name comes from the Cantiaci tribe that lived in the area at the time of the Roman Invasion. It has a 2,000 year history. It was the Capital of the new Kingdom (United Kingdom) from the sixth century onwards and the main residence of King Ethelbert from around AD 590.

It was at one time, the most important centre of learning in the country, as there was a huge development of literacy, education and scholarship at the Abbey, how it was known at the time. It is the only city in Kent and was granted the City Charter in 1448, giving it a mayor and a high sheriff. It still has to this day a Lord Mayor and Sheriff. With its old Roman name 'Cantwareburh', Canterbury lies in Kent, famously known as the Garden of England and as the oldest county in England. It contains

more castles and historic houses than any other region.

Canterbury Cathedral is England's first Cathedral founded by St. Augustine in 597 AD. It is known as a unique place of worship, a major pilgrimage destination, a masterpiece of art and architecture and one of the UK's most visited historic sites. Being the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, it is known as a sacred and a deeply spiritual place since Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered there in 1170.

This imposing red building that was currently a hotel was attractive to me, and I decided to take the chance once again and buy it. The owners were Stan Martin and his wife, who were very amicable and pleasant people. We got on very well remained friends for many years after that. I knew that I needed to convert The Red House into a Nursing facility before approaching the Local Authorities, and that I was taking a huge

risk as I could not be sure they would change the registration from Hotel to Nursing Home, therefore I was quite nervous and scared but nevertheless went ahead with the purchase.

I hired a builder and an architect to do the conversation inside but had them agree in writing beforehand that they would finish the work within 6 months. Mrs. Howard from the Local Authority oversaw monitoring of care homes in the area and I booked her to come and assess the conversion work so far. She finally came after 6 months and I was really worried that she may refuse me the license and was unable to sleep the previous night. When she came, she looked around everywhere and I walked around with her with butterflies in my stomach at every corner. To my surprise, she was very impressed with the work and said she would grant me the license. I could not believe it and almost cried with happiness.

After the conversion was completed, I had one resident and a one-night nurse, Margaret Sopp. I was the day nurse and I had a cook and a cleaner and that was my total workforce for some time. The residents' fee was £222, which was a lot of money then, but was all taken up with the wages and still not enough. My other home, Barham House Nursing Home, had to support Red House in the beginning until it was able to stand on its own two feet. Margaret Sopp and I worked beautifully together, and she worked for me for many years. We have remained good friends up to today. To attract more residents, I put an advert on the local radio to announce that the Home was now ready to accommodate residents. People soon started responding and gradually the Home increased the number of residents and was full within a short while, around 6 months. As the number of residents increased, so did the number of staff.

That was the beginning of what we now know as The Red House Nursing Home. I did not change

the name because it had a history. The name came about because of the Red Dean of Canterbury Cathedral who lived there during his post as a Dean. Known as the Red Dean because of his interest and support of Communism world development. He retired as Dean of Canterbury in 1963 at age 89 and had lived at the Red House, before it was a hotel.

The Red House was built in 1886 as a vicarage for St Dunstan's church, an over 1,000-year-old Church on London Road which is also my local church that I have been attending since coming to Canterbury and where I have made many friends and also looked after them or their elderly relatives in the Red House Nursing Home. I now attend both St. Dunstan church and Canterbury Cathedral although I attend the Cathedral more. I have met and made many friends and over the years, many Canons and their wives as well as other church goers have been residents at the Red House Nursing Home. I recently looked after Dean's sister and have also made friends with a lady named Joan, who

was the wife of The Archbishop Ramsey and she once came here for Convalescent in the Red House. The Red House Nursing Home has been visited by Archbishop Rancey on many occasions; he usually came to visit his good friend, Archdeacon Alex Sergeant.

After purchasing the Red House in 1986 and converting it to a Nursing Home, I soon knew that I would need more spaces such as auxiliary rooms, a quiet room, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, store room, medicine room, manager's room, reception room, wheelchair room, laundry room as well as a staff room, I therefore saw a real need to build an extension, if I was going to make the business into a success. I decided to create another similar building that would increase the intake of residents to 31 and make the business more viable. This was possible as there was enough ground for this venture and it was completed in 1990 which increased the numbers of rooms to 27, many of them ensuite.

In the beginning, my role in the Nursing Home was multifaceted. I was the matron of the Home; worked as a sister daily; administrator, dealing with paperwork as I did not have a secretary at the time, nor could I afford one. I was also on call at night and had a nurse on duty, who was an enrolled nurse (EN), a qualification just below RGN (at the time SRN) Me and Harry (my husband) lived upstairs on the 2nd floor of the original building but had to cook and eat downstairs. We lived there for 15 years. Being in charge, I managed to save a lot of money, which was necessary to pay the mortgage repayments of £15,000 per month; an incredible amount of money at the time. The Red House Nursing Home managed to pay off its own mortgage and survive through a very difficult time as I did not even take home a wage.

Meanwhile, Barham House Nursing Home was struggling to maintain itself. As I had mentioned to Harry at the time of purchasing this incredibly beautiful building, that it would not be a good

business venture because of its location. It was difficult to admit new residents and relatives did not want to bring their parents there as it was challenging to visit them. Barham House Nursing Home started to increasingly rely on Red House which put a strain on the home.

I struggled for a number of years but could not carry on supporting Barham and started thinking of selling it. My husband, Harry died in 1995 and I finally had to let go of Barham House Nursing Home in 1998 after some resistance and challenge selling it. At the time, my children were unable to come and help me run the home as they were building their own careers. It was a very difficult time.

It took some time, but eventually, the Red House Nursing Home settled down, became very popular with the local community and was constantly full. We often had more enquiries than we had beds and had to manage a waiting list for rooms.

In 2016, we celebrated 30 years of trading and serving the community and had a big BBQ with a guest list of around 250 people. As usual, we had the Mayor of Canterbury open the BBQ and this same time we had a raffle for The Rotary Club of Canterbury, which I am now a member of, and collected almost £1,000 to help with the Club's charitable causes.

As mentioned earlier, I became an advent fan of the Royal family after meeting Elizabeth II the day before she became queen in Kenya and one day out of the blue, my daughter presented me with an invitation to go to Buckingham palace at the invite of the Queen's secretary. I was shocked but so surprised. She tells her story how she did it here. It was a day to remember and never forget.

VISITING BUCKINGHAM PALACE

I, the Author, woke up one day and decided that Queen Elizabeth the II ought to know about my mother and I was fascinate by the idea that they

had been in each other's presence during the Queen of England's visit to Kenya, as a princess. So I wrote a letter on my then headed paper and posted it straight away. It's only after posting, that I thought that perhaps I had done a 'bad' thing, writing to the Queen personally. Well to be too late but I had a few times, when I wondered whether I would be called and reprimanded for my action. I did not hear from anyone for quite a while, and I subsequently thought that it had been thrown in the trash like many others; I presumed and went on merrily with my life with my then young children.

One day, out of the blue, I picked up my phone to a voice and an accent I had never come across before. The gentleman spoke in a very crisp and clear manner; I wondered where he came from. He proceeded to ask if I was Wanjiru Gichigi, to which I said yes, but now I got suspicious as whom it was. He then announced that he was calling from the Queen's office and that he was one of her secretaries. Well, I gasped, stopped

and got really scared. They had caught up with me, I thought quickly. So I asked him timidly how I could help him and he laughed and said I want to help you by inviting you and your mum to Buckingham Palace for Tea! Well, I nearly fell off my chair and thought it was a joke, but he kindly and humorously assured me that it was real and asked me where he could send me the invitation cards. I was over the moon! Eventually I received the cards, and we went to Buckingham Palace, dressed in our best newly bought costumes and had the most wonderful day there!



***Rosemarie and her daughter Wanjiru
outside Buckingham Palace***

Children, grandchildren and beyond

Throughout these challenges and triumphs, I have become a grandmother of ten, from my three maternal children. John, the eldest, has four sons Chris, Alan, Philip and Andrew. Chris has two children, Harley and Beau. Alan has one son.

Paul, my middle child who sadly passed away in 2015 also had four children: two boys and two girls. The eldest is Mikey, who has two children: Theo and Eden. His second eldest, Sonita, who resides in Germany, has one daughter, Noemi and Shelley who has a son, Musa. His youngest, Lawrence, is the editor and publisher of this book and is yet to have children, but got married to his childhood sweetheart, Natalie in 2022 in Portugal, where they reside.

Wanjiru, my youngest, has two sons, Reletile Riitho (or Lee for short) and Neo Gitahi, who has now given her twin girl grandchildren,

Amelia and Aaliyah. Therefore, there are 10 grandchildren from my biological children and from them, there are nine great grandchildren. I have an adopted daughter, Salome, (I adopted her from my sister, Wangui, since she was seven years old). She has three children, Colin, Aaron and Michael. Colin has three children; Dean, Naomi and Shaun, Aaron also has three children; Mauro, and Michael has one son, Seth. Dean, Colin's eldest son, has two children, Eden and Noah, who are my great, great grandchildren. All together I have 13 grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren and two great, great grandchildren.

In 2018, we had a fantastic celebration of my 90th birthday with Wanjiru celebrating her 60th birthday and my grandson, Lawrence, his 30th birthday! It is ironic that they are the writers, researchers and editors of this book!

I have settled in Canterbury and have become a permanent feature around the city, having been here for over 40 years, having also been one of the first dark skinned people around to set up business. This means that wherever I go, people

recognize me, stopping to greet me, though I cannot remember everyone. After purchasing the Red House Hotel and turning it into a nursing home, I have attracted a lot of friends especially from the Cathedral and my local church St. Dunstan. Many residents have come from these two places, who have come to The Red House to spend their last few years or sometimes only months. We pride ourselves in the care we give to the elderly and show them respect for choosing us. There have been a few Archdeacons and Deacons who have passed away in the Home and visitors to the home have included The Archbishop John Carey among others. I finally got used to living in the countryside and love it now.

So in preparation for my retirement, I purchased a property nearby, about 5mins walk from the Home and have lived there ever since. I had spent many years living above my businesses, and I felt it was time for me to have separate living accommodation away from the business. My modest three-bedroom house is a place

where I find solace where I have welcomed many friends and relatives to stay. I am still active and like to do my own shopping, go to the seaside or even do a little gardening. My kitchen is also my office, as I still partly manage the rented accommodation that I bought some time back. I am always busy! It's also a place where I can invite my grand and great-grandchildren to come and stay. I am proud to have reached this milestone and to see my genes spread all over the world.



Rosemarie with her grandchildren and great grand children

If I hadn't been working such long hours, I would have loved to travel more but I am grateful that I have been able to visit many countries, including North and South America, South Africa and even Georgia in Eastern Europe! I had a good friend, Kathy, who unfortunately passed on sometime back and with whom and I travelled a lot together. Some of the places we went to include Mexico, Cyprus, Greece, Tunisia, Kenya, Dominican Republic, Italy, Florida, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium. My recent travel escapades have taken me to Zambia for a Wedding, and I am now going to travel to Zanzibar for another wedding. Phew, I do wish I could travel more but health issues have made it somewhat challenging.

My life has been an incredible journey and enjoyed its challenges and triumphs. If I could go back, I wouldn't change a thing; perhaps I would travel a bit more. Since I was little, I have always wanted to be a nurse and look after people in need, and it is something I would do all over again. I thrive on working hard and

succeeding and have learnt a lot about creating a business from scratch as well as buying properties. I learnt to be independent from a very young age and to this day, still drive myself to shops and to visit friends as well as occasionally as far as London. I am also a member of several clubs in Canterbury, one notably being The Rotary Club, attending meetings and fund-raising events organized to help marginalized members of our community. I am proud to say, I am one of the only African women!



ANALYSIS

As of today, 2025, I am grateful and feel blessed to say that out of my seven siblings, I still have my sister Wangui (99yrs) with us and my brother Stephen Kibera (88)yrs, who both reside in Kenya

I am also grateful and thankful to God for helping me pull myself out of abject poverty and achieve so much in my lifetime! As we never solely achieve our dreams and goals alone and along my journey there are many people who aided me in my achievement; one of the most important being my mother and Brother Moses, who both accepted to look after my children whilst I was away.

My hope and wish is that my story of triumph over adversity inspires both men and women to know that anything is possible. The fact that, I came from living in very challenging environment at the foothill of Mount Kenya,

beautiful as it was, it was a poor existence, yet through sheer determination, I was able to remove myself from it and achieve goals beyond my imagination is a testimony.

Being a woman of colour, meant I had to face both sexism and racism on top of having to adjust to a foreign culture in a country where I knew no one. To be honest, I never focused much on these issues and only forged ahead with my aims and goals with a single-minded determination.

I remember for example trying to get a mortgage for my first house and the manager trying to turn me down because I did not have a man sat beside me. He said that the fact I was a single woman, he felt that his money would not be safe. I do not know where I got the courage from, but asked him if he wanted me to pick a man off the street so that he could feel at ease lending me the money. I pointed out that I earned more money than most men on the street and I did not see

why he was refusing me the loan. I now believe that my audacity won the day and he had no choice but to concede.

On another occasion, I met resistance from another Bank manager who wanted to know if I had prior experience running a business and when I said no, he told me that he was unable to lend me the money for that reason. So I asked whether he had had previous experience of running a bank before he got his first job. When he said no, I pointed out that obviously someone had given him a chance to prove himself and that is why he is now in that position. This statement alone made him think twice and he finally agreed to give me the loan and the opportunity to prove myself!

I give these two examples to show that you sometimes have to be audacious and cheeky to prove a point and should never give up at the first refusal. I have been taking chances all of my life and they have helped me to get to where I am. I therefore encourage all those who read my story to be cheeky, audacious and

determined. Do not ever give up. You have nothing to lose and a lot to gain if you try and try and try again! Be daring, be bold, be brave but never be defeated!

As the author and Researcher of this fascinating Biography of Rosemarie Muthoni, I have learnt a lot about her struggles and of course her achievements, which are clearly visible. Along the way, I have also been able to place myself in between the lines and with that, understand how I fitted into the story, how it affected me and my brothers, positively or adversely.

It has allowed me to reflect on my life and give myself credit for the part me and my brothers played and how in an invisible way, we contributed to her achievements and success, just by being there.

I vehemently believe that we all have a fascinating personal story to tell about our life's journey, our trials and tribulations, and our successes and so-called failures.

One of the positive ways my mother's journey affected me is to endow me with a tenacity to keep on going no matter how difficult the journey gets. This is demonstrated by the writing of this book as narrated at the beginning of the book. She also gave me a sense of independence and the ability to stand on my own two feet in all situations. I am now inspired to write my own Biography or perhaps my children will do that for me too!

The stories of many people of African descent who faced challenging decisions to move away from their homes, leave their children and travel to foreign lands are still to be told. I believe it is the right time now to write 'Our Story' for future generations to understand the struggles faced by many and inspire them to keep on going and create their own future stories for generations to come.

With that in mind, I hereby give a few scope questions to contemplate and perhaps inspire the beginning of a short story for a future book.

Comprehensive Scope Questions

If you are 50yrs and over, did your parents leave you to seek green pastures abroad? If so, how old were you when they left? Who did they leave you with and how did that affect you?

What was your relationship with your mother/father like then and how is it now?

How about school? Did you have to go to boarding school and how was that for you? How did that affect you emotionally and who did you run to for support, when your parents were not around?

If one or two of your parents went abroad either for work or study, how were you treated by others back home? Were you favored because of it or maltreated?

Did you eventually join your parents abroad, and if so how old were you? How did the move affect you and what was it like moving to a

foreign land and leaving your extended family behind?

Finally, I hope that this story inspires you to either write your parents or your own story and to see how one person's decision to overcome adversity can be a catalyst of inspired change in many other individuals.