

Annie's Story

Excerpts from a letter of appreciation from Annie, a Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA) nursing scholar in Malawi, October 2006.

I am Annie, born on the 11th of April, 1984. My mum died in 1991 [when Annie was 7], and Dad in 1994 [when Annie was 10].

Primary Education: I call this a dark age in my life. It was a period when basic resources were so scarce. Life at school was not easy without a dress, without a skirt or blouse, but only rags. My friends could laugh at me, teachers could molest me. A girl child's life is so difficult, but God is gracious, abounding in love and led me through, for the problem was food and clothing, but not intelligence.

Secondary Education: Life at secondary school was so harsh. Where to get fees, where to get a uniform, pocket money, these made my days miserable. I went in search of piece work at teacher's homes, washing their clothes to raise money for fees. When I could not raise the money, the school would chase me from the campus. But I stuck around, peeking at my classmate's notes and trying to make sense of them.

When I got to my village, I could not eat, only thinking, "If I were at school..." When I saw the lights from the school, I would enter my grass thatched room and start weeping. But nobody was to blame, for the aunt I lived with was a single lady in her 80s.

One day, I decided enough was enough. I asked the headmaster to provide me a letter of introduction so that I could go into offices and negotiate. "Give me money for school fees, and I will work for you during the holidays." My friends laughed at me. My eyes were always full of tears, for shame, ridicule, and oppression were always around me, a poor girl.

One thing I desired from the Lord, to make me pass my final year exams and go to University. An NGO worker helped me pay the fees for entrance exams, which I passed exceptionally. I was selected to pursue a BSC Degree in Nursing at Kamuzu College of Nursing. Instead of being happy, I was worried about where to get the funds. I engaged in embroidery, selling it and getting a little money for my upkeep. Life was too hard, for men wanted to take advantage of my status but I refused. I felt equally important as anyone else.

Until GAIA came and shared the burden, I am not longer the object of scorn; I am no longer the victim of evil men's desires. Now I function as anybody else with the upkeep allowance I get from the scholarship.

About GAIA

The mission of Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA) is to deliver HIV-related and basic health services to rural villages and health facilities in Africa.

GAIA is committed to assisting communities in the resource-poor, African country of Malawi combat the devastating effects of the AIDS epidemic. Malawi is located at the epicenter of the global AIDS crisis, with 1 million of its 12 million citizens infected with HIV. As a direct result, the average life expectancy in Malawi is 41 years, and over half a million children have been orphaned by AIDS. Learn more at www.thegaia.org.

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