The first few weeks were tough for me. Some of you may recall that we had a group of Namibian students who ‘rebelled’ against the rules and regulations of the school at the time and who were eventually expelled from Saker and were returned to the camps in Angola. I was caught in the middle at times, was scared and confused as I did not know whether to join the group or not. It was my first year at Saker when this happened and for me I really did not understand what triggered them to do what they did. Although at times I wished I could join them because I knew that was a passport to let me go and be reunited with my loved ones.

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Yet, on the other hand I knew returning to Angola would have given my mother the passport to “kill me with her bare hands.” Hence I had no option but to adapt to the situation at Saker.

 It was tough and at times I cried alone, due to loneliness and longing for my mom and siblings. It was made clear to us from the beginning before we boarded the plane to Cameroon that we were to stay for five year secondary education without any chance of a holiday to Angola and I never thought I would endure that.

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I arrived at Saker late in 1979 around October/November, and the academic year had already started in September. I needed a sense of belonging and be part of my class. I was shy to mingle with the girls in my class because I really could not communicate well in English. There were those classmates who laughed at my broken English and they enjoyed my accent. But that did not deter me because I thought to myself I needed to be part of them.

 I decided to come up with a strategy, knowing that they have never been in a war situation or lived in camps in the middle of nowhere. I started telling them about my experience of living in the bush. The joy came when they started getting interested and more of them wanted to know more about life in refugee camps. It was hard for many of them to imagine and understand what life was like in a refugee camp.

The more they came to listen the more I started making up stories and I felt I was on top of the world at the time. I told them how I was “trained as a soldier and killed many enemy soldiers with the popular Russian riffle, AK47. I told them I killed lions and elephants and went for night and days without food as a soldier”. Sometimes I would make up stories just to entertain them especially, and they believed me. I enjoyed seeing them perplexed and deep down I would laugh to it. Through that, I became popular and made many friends in my class. Most weekdays after siesta or Saturday afternoon, instead of going up to class to read, my classmates will surround me to hear my stories on the lawn behind the circle by the flag poles near the admin block. I even became so mischievous and just loved to entertain my classmates, but to them, it was real and that is how I found my sense of belonging.

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At times during lunch in the dining hall, Namibian girls were called upon by some of the prefects to entertain the rest of the students with Namibian songs and dances, and I would be the first to jump on the stage, even though I had not finished my zeze, or corn chaff or beans and ripe plantain or whatever meal it was for the day. I taught the choir and classmates songs in my native language and entertaining-dancing songs which they really enjoyed and I am surprised majority of the girls still remember these songs. I feel so overwhelmingly fulfilled to the extent that I am proud of the fact that I have left a legacy in that field, as my little humble contribution during my five year stay at Saker.

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My love for singing even paved way for me to become one of the assistants to the music prefect in my third year and in my final year at Saker, I became the music prefect (first ever Namibian prefect).

During the war while at home in Namibia even though the political and economic situation rough and tough for native Namibians, my parents tried so hard to take good care of us from the time we were little. They taught us the values of life such as to obey and fear the Almighty, to respect our elders and people around us. We went to Sunday school and sang in the Sunday school choir. I was also part of our church youth choir. So singing at Saker was not a new phenomenon for me. I feel blessed for having been sent to Saker amongst all the secondary schools in the South West Province, because Saker just continued to teach and instill the values from home and nurtured me into a God- fearing teenager.

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As tradition still has it at Saker, I was adopted by sister Batenyo Makia and joined the long line of her petites such as Ozee, Anita, Irmhild and Nanjui. I remember my first Visiting Sunday at Saker when Batenyo’s parents came to visit her, she was just so proud to show me off to Mr and Mrs Makia. Mrs Makia stared into my big brown eyes for a while and right away made the decision to adopt me. She turned to her husband and said, “Papa, I like this one, we go take this pikin, holiday come, she go come Kumba”. Their intentions were made known to our then principal late Mr Tayui, and I officially became part of the Makia clan and since then every holiday was spent with them till I departed Cameroon back to the camps in Angola.

Living with the Makia family in Kumba was such a thrill for me. I literally became part of the Makia household. They nurtured me so well and they continue to instil the values of life in me and treated me like a queen and because of my name Elizabeth, my mom Mrs Makia called me Queen all the time and my father Mr Makia called me "Eli-koko".

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In 1982, I was privileged during the long holiday in my third year while in Kumba, to receive a surprise visit from my biological mother. She was coming from Nigeria where she had just attended a World Health Organisation seminar in Lagos. She stayed with us at the Makia residence in Kumba and we even drove to Limbe for mom to see Saker. My mother met Baba and my sister Batenyo who was on campus during that holiday preparing for GCE, Class of 82. At that time, I truly felt honored and privileged for my biological mother to have visited and to meet the Makia family and our then principal. None of my Namibian colleagues in Cameroon or even those who were studying in the rest of the other West African countries ever had that opportunity of being visited by either one of their parents. For me, it was a true blessing and I thank God Almighty for according me that opportunity. In a way it was a big relief and an encouragement for me to stay on until my mission was accomplished in Cameroon.

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After Cameroon, in 1986, I was fortunate to receive a scholarship that took me to Zimbabwe where I did a two year National Diploma in Mass Communication at the Harare Polytechnic. When I went back to the camps in 1984, communication through letters was very difficult because sometimes letters never reached their final destinations. The best thing at the time was just to make sure that I held on to the Makia P. O. Box 35, Kumba, Cameroon.

Moving to Zimbabwe, communication was more smooth and easy. I could now communicate with my family again and I want to acknowledge my brother Tabi Makia who is here tonight for being the link and who always tried to search for me when I became lax in communicating.

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Upon completion of my diploma in Zimbabwe in 1988, I got another scholarship to study communications in Vancouver, Canada. While in Canada, the link between me and the Makias was even easier for I could now visit them here in America. Thank you, my big sister Banyo, my big brother Asek and Mrs Makia, for taking care of my first born whom you named Spooky – while I was finalising my studies in Canada.

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Even though I went back to the camps after Cameroon, and from there ventured to other parts of our wonderful world – a strong foundation was laid for me by Saker Baptist College and the Makia family. It has upheld me and made me what I am today. The norms and values that were instilled in me guided me through the difficult journeys that I had to undertake by myself and shielded me from all sorts of distractions that awaited me. Some of my comrades and peers in exile, be it in camps or in the countries where they found themselves, went astray and their lives were destroyed. I thank God for taking care of me and my family through this rough and sometimes difficult life of a refugee. In 1994 I went back home to an independent Namibia, to join the rest of the comrades and contribute positively to a new Namibia.

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At this point, I would like to acknowledge our late principal Mr Tayui, whom we fondly called Baba, for admitting Namibians to Saker. Thank you, Ms Binder, for keeping us straight on our toes and most importantly, for not treating us differently from the rest of the students. Also Bob, Mr Ntonifor, Mrs Ewanga, Ms King, and the rest of the staff at Saker during my time, for the sacrifice and perseverance. Not to forget Ms Kern and Ms Fokam for teaching us those beautiful songs that turned us into angelic voices from up high. Those teachings and values made us, Saker girls, stand out and it distinguished us from the rest.

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Thank you, Cameroon, for being so generous in allowing us then refugee students, to study and further our education in your various institutions. Thank you to the Cameroonian families that were willing to put forth and share whatever little they had with us. I am forever thankful for the opportunity that has significantly contributed to the woman that I am today. Today, among the many hats I wear, I am a wife to my sweetheart of fourteen years in marriage, Popyeni Shikwambi and blessed with four handsome boys , Pandeni, Pameni, Penda and Pandu.

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Last but not the least, this is a great testimony for me and I thank the organisers for having given me the opportunity to present my story. I will dearly hold on to the memory and share it back home with my family, fellow Namibian colleagues that studied in Cameroon and others alike. Know that if you ever find yourself in the southern part of our continent – our home is your home!!!!!!!

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 I love you and God bless you all.