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FEATURE: How a divorced mother of two braved ridicule to go back to school.

Story by **BARNABAS BII**
Publication Date: 3/9/2005

How a divorced mother of two braved ridicule to go back to school. By BARNABAS BII

When 32-year-old Cherotich Chesoin made up her mind to enrol in Standard Eight at Cheptabach Primary School in Nandi South District five years ago, many took it as a joke, especially because her first-born child, Victor Kipronoh, was in Standard Three in the neighbouring Chemartim Primary School.

The divorced mother of two went on to show the world just how serious she was when she made it to secondary school and sat her KCSE exams last year. When the results came out last week, she had scored an impressive B+ mean grade. She is now considered a role model in her village and its environs.

Cherotich, the fifth of six children of Joseph (now dead) and Julia Cheison, first enrolled in Cheptabach Primary School in 1982. She held the top position throughout her time in primary school before opting for marriage in 1990.

"I gave birth to my first child in 1990 and went back to Standard Seven in 1991. I sat my KCPE exams in 1992 and scored 52 points out of 84, which was a great disappointment," she says.

Her low grades saw her lose any hope of making it academically and she returned to her household chores. Her husband, Abraham Keter, was a tea plucker in a neighbouring tea estate.

"It was the most miserable time of my life even though I had been offered the chance to be a nursery school teacher at Cheptabach Primary School. Money was scarce and we often went without food," recalls Cheison with bitterness.

She conceived her second child, Sharon Chepleting, in 1996. Then things took a turn for the worse.

"Soon after I gave birth to Sharon, Keter began neglecting his family responsibilities and finally abandoned us altogether. He left for Kericho where he married another woman. I was left with no option but to return to my parents' home."

But after a while she decided she wasn't ready to give up on her marriage. "After I was paid Sh1,500 as part of my payment for teaching, I followed him to Kericho. But he wanted nothing to do with me."



Cherotich Cheison fetching firewood.

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Models
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necessary.
Must be
slender and
have a pretty
smile.



Congratulations from mother Julia Songok

She says that Keter, who had since become a stone harvester, chased her away like a dog while vowing never to go back to her now that he had another wife.

“I had to forget all about him and decide what to do with my life. I went back to teaching, which I did until 1999.”

At this time, one of her brothers, Daniel, returned from his studies in India only to find her in a terrible state.

“My brother could not believe what had happened to my since he left the country. Despite the fact that I had a job, I was depressed and had lost all hope,” discloses Cherotich.

A family meeting was immediately called and a resolution passed that she should go back to school. “I resisted initially because my first-born was already in Standard Three then.”

But her brothers said she had to rejoin Standard Eight at Cheptabach if her life was to become meaningful again. After some persuading, she took up the challenge and sat her KCPE exams in 2000. She set a record at the school by scoring 72 out of 84 points and was admitted to Form One at Moi Girls High school, Eldoret. Her next goal was to pass her KCSE and get admission in a public university.

“Throughout secondary school I kept my marital status a secret. No one, except the principal, knew that I was once married and had two children,” she says.

When the exam results were released, Cherotich was busy at home, situated about 15 kilometres from Nandi Hills Town, fetching firewood to cook the evening meal. Told what she had managed to score, she broke down and cried for joy. In a matter of minutes, the news had gone round and villagers swarmed into the homestead to congratulate her.



Hug from her 14 year old son, Victor Rono

Her mother Julia and sister-in-law Ednah could not hide their joy on hearing the good news and hugged her excitedly.

“I had to sell almost everything and was left with just one cow so she could go back to school. But I have no regrets now. I am confident of good things ahead,” says Julia.

The older woman's only regret is that her daughter had decided to drop out of school in the first place. “I thought all was lost when she decided to get married. Thank God that we can now realise the fruits of her going back to school.”






Cherotich with her former Principal, Helen Cherambos (left) and deputy Winnie Nyabindi

Cherotich, who scored mainly A's and B's, says she is interested in pursuing dentistry, veterinary medicine or computer engineering at university.

“I always wanted to do medicine, but I don't mind doing any other course that will be beneficial to the society,” she says.

She is grateful to her family and teachers for motivating her to turn her life around and challenges women who have put marriage before education. “It's never too late to go back to school. Age is just a number and education has no age limit,” she says, as tears of joy continue to roll down her cheeks.

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LIVING**Well done, Cherotich!**

Story by Nation Editor
 Publication Date: 3/16/2005

I was intrigued by Cherotich Chesoin's success story, especially her resolve to pursue education to the highest level possible. Having been doomed to live with an abusive husband, yet yearning for a successful marriage, she braved all odds to attain an education.

Special commendation must go to the Principal of Moi Girls, Eldoret, for giving Cherotich an opportunity to study as a normal student when few public schools would condone the admission of a pregnant, let alone once-married, student. I shudder to think that there are many more academically talented women out there who have had to abandon their education due to pregnancy or early marriage. Cherotich should stand as an inspiration to them.

I would appeal to those organisations that promote women's education as well as individuals of goodwill to support Cherotich so that she can realise her dream and become a living testimony of how girls can redeem their education.

Jeremy Ng'ang'a, Kikuyu

Shiku and Atef are an inspiration

The article, "Mum I'm pregnant", was so inspiring. We, the youth, have a lot to learn from Atef and Shiku. As we go through life, we should be able to admit our mistakes and be ready to take the responsibility that comes with what we do. By accepting to meet Shiku's mother, Atef comes across as a responsible young man. It showed that he was sorry not only to Shiku but even to her family. That is real companionship in the storm of life.

Compliments also go to Shiku's parents, who demonstrated their understanding and showed their love when it was most wanted. They set themselves as role models. How I wish all parents were like them! If all young men stood by their girlfriends like Atef, and all girls acted like Shiku and all parents reacted like hers did, abortion and the related stress would be a thing of the past.

I thank the editor and publishers for such articles that give us opportunities to learn from other people's experiences.

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Paul Wanyonyi, Kitale

Jane has done parents proud

It's the worst nightmare that faces every parent when a daughter falls pregnant while in school or college. I'm really proud of Jane Matheri for the wise and calm decision she took while faced by the dilemma. Kudos to Living magazine for highlighting such an inspiring story. I'm sure you've changed many parents' reasoning.

Mary Kathomi Riungu, Nairobi

Shiku was very brave

I would like to congratulate Shiku for having the guts to tell her mum about her pregnancy. Many teenage girls in her position would have sought an abortion, which could lead to complications or even death.

Congratulations too, to Shiku's mum and dad for accepting the situation. Lastly, parents, especially the mothers, should be open with their teenage daughters and talk about sex before marriage and its consequences.

Valentine Manga, Nairobi

Strong bond beats riches

The article on Jane Matheri's shows how she used her wisdom to handle her 19-year-old daughter's pregnancy. She portrayed the strong bond she had with her daughter. She realised that there was no use crying over spilt milk. Congratulations Mrs Matheri, your genuine expression of love and support towards your daughter beats riches!

Patricia Mathu, Nairobi

God bless mothers

With reference to the article, "Mum I'm pregnant", I am very happy with the way Jane Matheri took control of the situation. And yes, Shiku's father, too. How lovely it is to know that such mature men exist!

God bless all mothers for being there for us, even when we are in trouble. Mum, thank you.

Bernice Gathuma, Nairobi

Fathers should also be involved

I read your story, "Mum I'm pregnant" and recalled the day, 24 years ago, my mother discovered that I was pregnant with my daughter. I also remember that my mum was the last to know and then only because friends and neighbours told her. But by then, I was already seven months gone. She could not face my father to tell him of my condition and asked me to do it myself. I can relate to Shiku's mother's dilemma because the minute your daughter enters puberty and boys start hovering over your fence, all you can do is worry and pray.

The situation gets worse when the girl's father thinks you should be blamed when parenting should actually involve both parents. No child belongs to the mother alone. Even Jesus, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, had a father.

Name and address withheld.

Treat your maid well

The article, "Part Of The Family", was correct in saying that a successful relationship with your domestic worker has everything to do with your attitude towards each other. I'm glad you brought up this issue because it's of help, especially to those who don't know the secret. If you treat your maid the way you want your boss to treat you at your place of work, then she will respect you and you will be comfortable with her work. Maids who take their boss' husbands simply want to revenge for being mistreated. If we follow the example of Margaret Kiundi, we can expect to have excellent relationships with our domestic workers.




Jane Lubale, Nairobi

Maids are important to us

The brave approach to issues by Living magazine has made it stand out. Last week's cover story particularly really highlighted an

important person in our lives – the house help. My mother was and still is a working woman and we were brought up by house helps and I'm what I am today because of the women who took care of us. Mum made sure she treated them as members of the family. Thanks once again for reminding us how important they are to us.

Grace Muiruri, Nairobi

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