



**Interview with:** Faith (13)  
**Interviewed by:** Charlotte  
**Date of interview:** 24 February 2017  
**Travel:** Zimbabwe – South Africa

**Charlotte:** Today I am talking to a woman who came from Zimbabwe to live here in Durban. She has consented to the interview and to the recording, for which I thank her.

When did you come to live in Durban and what motivated your move from Zimbabwe?

**Faith:** Okay, I came to Durban in 2008. Things were hard in Zimbabwe. I was living with my husband and our daughter. In 2007 my husband came here, to Joburg actually, because he had heard that jobs were available. He did not have a job at home and things were hard. In fact, there were no jobs. We lost contact after he left for Johannesburg. We have never had communication. I didn't know where he was. I still don't know where he is.

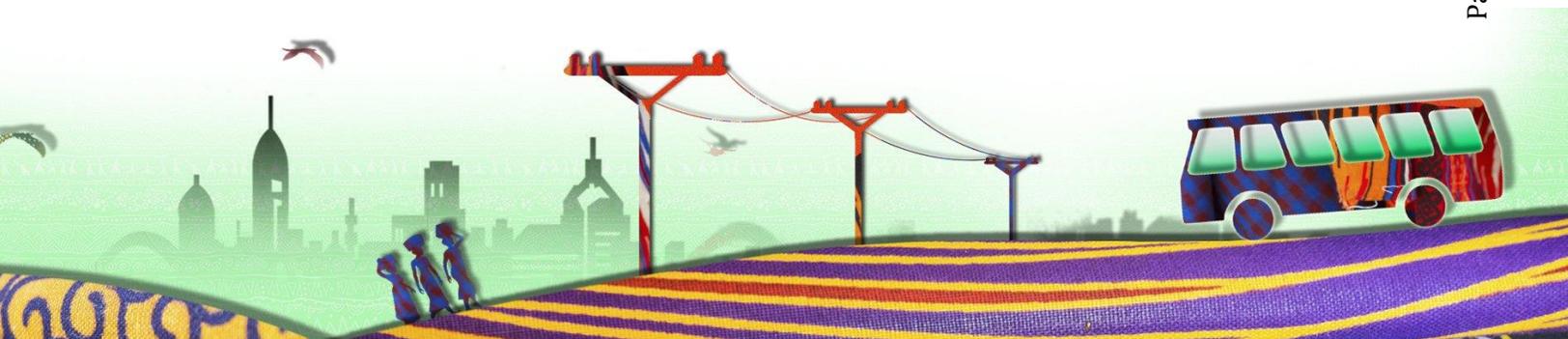
At that time, I was living at his parents' home. It was very hard for me to wait for him, not knowing if he was even alive. I decided to go to my parent's home, thinking that I might be waiting for a dead person.

So I went back home with my daughter at the beginning of 2008. At that time, she was only three years old. We were living with my mother (daughter's grandmother), but it was clear that things were not well. The family had become big.

So I made a decision to go to South Africa to follow my husband (daughter's father). I thought maybe his quietness meant things were well. So, I took a bus to come to South Africa.

I did not have a single person I knew here. The only person I knew was a woman who attended the same church as me in Zimbabwe. I knew that when I got to South Africa, I would contact her. So I took the bus to Johannesburg without any problems. I contacted this woman, who lived in Durban, and she told me how to proceed with the journey.

You know, when you know someone you always assume that things will be organised when you get there. You hear other people's stories and you think that things are easy here. I thought that since I was going to someone I knew I was not going to live in poverty like others do. But when I got to Durban it occurred to me that life was different from what I expected. I thought I was going to a home where I would be living freely, feeling at home. When I got to the place I found that it was a very dilapidated place. It was like a squatter area for foreigners who have come without a place to live. We call such a place *Chibharuma* [Shona for balloon, used to describe how derelict accommodation next to the Durban Station appears to continuously stretch to accommodate more Zimbabweans]. That was one of the things that was really hard for me when I got here. I wondered if I would live there for the rest of my life. It was really eating me up, thinking that even if I took my child from home, it meant that I would bring her to a place like that. Maybe you might be wondering why living at that place ate me up inside. I really can't say that it's the fault of the woman who took me there. No. It's just that the place was like this and I really never imagined that people from other countries lived like this in South Africa. There is was like one room that is rented by everyone. So when you get a chance and a place where you could manage to rest your head, you would sleep. All that was important is that you had somewhere to sleep. There was no thought that people needed their own space—nothing like that. You just had to cope with how people lived there.





We were all so mixed and that is the other thing that ate me up. When I came I thought I had arrived in a country that was better, but we were all mixed there: men, women, young ladies who were all doing different kinds of things. The situation was hard. Amongst all these people we lived with, there were some young ladies who worked those kinds of jobs—if you know what I mean.

**Charlotte:** What do you mean by ‘those kind of jobs’?

**Faith:** Eh hh ... (hesitation). The only job they managed to get at that time was of sleeping with men for money. Maybe I can just say it was prostitution. I don’t know, but that is the job they did. So, that was the other thing that was eating me up.

I was really not happy with where I was living because I just felt as though it was not a good place for me. Sometimes you would listen to the stories they shared and think that we were all just living there because there was no other place to go. But some people told stories about where they had been or slept, about this and that that happened (expressing disgust).

So, after a short while there, I decided to focus on what I had come here for. I thought that it would be better for me to look for a job, but looking for a job when you are not educated, when you do not have work experience, is complicated. So it was hard for me. What was really pushed me to look for a job was that living at *Chibharuma* was not making me happy. I was thinking of my child who I had left at home with my mom. If my mom knew how I was living here she wouldn’t have been happy.

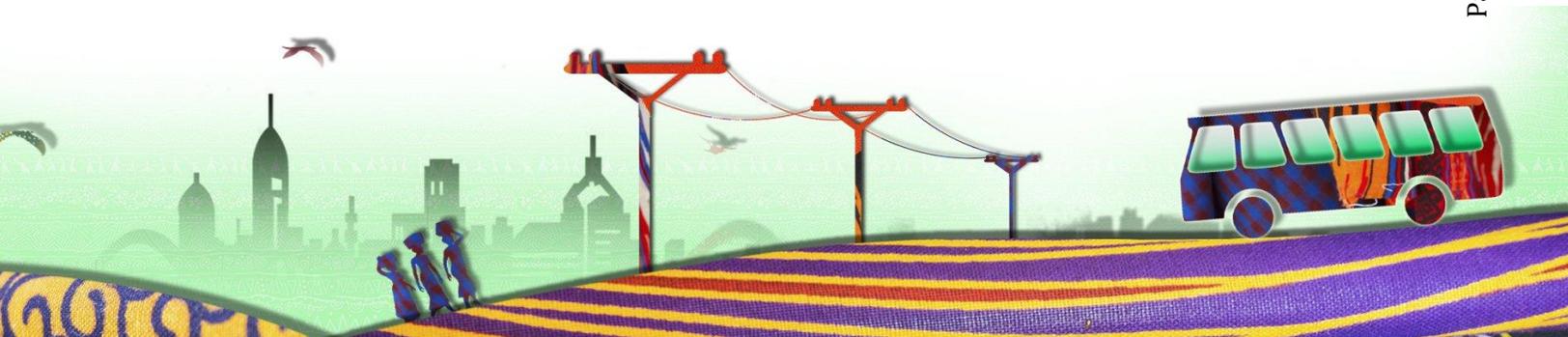
I worried a lot about what to do. Every morning I would wake up and go door to door in town looking for a job. As a person who was not well educated, without any qualification that I could use to get an office job or just a better job, I had to look for petty jobs like working in a shop, cooking or something like that. But the difficult thing was that there were no jobs and they were not hiring. So sometimes I would just end up going around and going back to where I was living. *Chibharuma* was now my home. But I continued looking for a job.

One day I woke up one day and I was lucky. I met a young lady while I was busy looking for a job and she told me about an Indian family that was looking for a maid. I had not imagined that I would leave my child behind to go and work as a maid. But looking at the situation at that time and the money they had said they would give me, I realised that it was a good option. Plus, she told me that they wanted a live-in maid so that made me happy. It meant that I could leave *Chibharuma* and live somewhere better.

This family that I went to work for was very big. They paid me, but I did not live in the same house as them. They had another house that was close and that is where I lived. When I finished work, I would go there to sleep. In the morning I would walk to their house—it was within walking distance.

The house was very big—I don’t want to lie. House chores are not difficult to do since I grew up doing them, but because the house was too big, the work was hard. Indian families are very big. You will find grandmother, grandchildren, children and distant relatives all living together. And all those people would want to order you around to do their personal things. So these are some of the things I encountered while I was working there.

The other thing that really got to me was that there were other women living in that house. Yes, I was getting paid to work there but some of the things they wanted me to do made me see that they were oppressing me and because I was getting paid I would just do it. Sometimes they would just take off their clothes and leave them there and I had to pick all the clothes up. It’s not something that takes a lot of energy but sometimes the clothes would be really dirty because some of them would be on their periods and after spoiling them they would just leave their clothes like that and I would pick them up from the floor and wash them.





This is not the job that I am doing right now. I left a long time ago. What made me leave is that the husband wanted to have a relationship with me. Sometimes when he drove me to my place at night when it was too late to walk, he started to like me too much and say he wanted to sleep with me. I was not happy because I respected him as someone else's husband and my employer. I couldn't do it.

The other thing that got to me was that after doing all the work I did in the house, I was not allowed to cook. I understood this because the food they ate was different from what I was used to and what I used to cook. I understood that and it made things easier because it gave me more time to finish house work. But when they finished cooking, when it came to eating, most of the time I did not eat the same food they were eating. They would put all the left-over food into the fridge. After two or three days they would wonder what to do about the food that was left over and would give the food to me to eat. Sometimes the food would already be bad. Those are some of the things I had to deal with. I did not want to continue working there.

When this man made his intentions clear to me, I was really affected, but I did not show it because I wanted my job. After a few days though, I heard him telling his wife that after I did laundry, his clothes were not getting clean. This shocked his wife because I did not do hand-washing but rather used washing machines. So the wife ended up asking me why her husband was acting the way he was. I decided to move on because I couldn't continue to work in a place where I was not happy, and the people I was working for were no longer happy, so that did not sit well with me. I worked there for three years as a maid. During that time, I had managed to raise a reasonable amount of money. Some of the money I would send home. I would send clothes and food to my mom, my young sisters and my child. But after a while I left where I was working because I was feeling unhappy.

**Charlotte:** You worked there for three years and then left. What did you do next?

**Faith:** As I said when you began interviewing me, I decided to look for a job but you know finding a job is difficult when you don't particularly have anything that you are good at. The only thing that I could do when I left home was plaiting hair and ... umm ... selling. Everything else I was not good at. So I went back to square one and began looking for a job. But I did not stay at that other place that I told you about. During the time that I was working for that Indian family, I met up with other women and young ladies from Zimbabwe and other countries. They would tell me some of the problems that they had to deal with, as well as the different places where they had worked. So I had found people I knew and could call my family.

So I decided that since I could plait, I should try and make money from that. I went to a certain salon and, being a humble person, I decided to do whatever job they allowed me to do. I looked for a flat and found one that I shared with other women. The job at the salon didn't involve plaiting hair like I was used to. I would do petty things like sweeping, washing hair, drying. I did not do this job for long because I did not understand how they dry hair here, as well as how they do other things here. Things were different from what I was used to at home. It was as though I did not understand what I was supposed to do, as though I could not do the job, so I was fired.

After that I decided to look for a job at another salon. When I found another job, I worked for a certain lady doing the same things, just washing hair, sweeping and helping out anyhow. I started working there but soon realised that the money I was getting was not good. I would work for a week and receive one hundred rand and that was not enough for anything. I realised that it was better to leave the job. Through the people I was living with and other people I knew, I heard that there was a woman who was hiring foreign women. So I decided to look for that woman because I wanted to see how things would turn out if I worked for her. I found her and started working and doing the same job I did before





I was fired and the same job that I had left—washing hair, sweeping and just helping out here and there. I was not really plaiting, but the money I was getting from that job was better. I then started plaiting while working for that woman.

From that point, I can say that my life became better compared than it was when I first arrived in 2008. This was around 2010, 2011. I then thought of bringing my child here, since I was getting better money from plaiting and stuff. The only issue was that my daughter would only be able to come to South Africa the same way I came, that is, by illegally crossing the border. I had money, but getting documentation for my child while I myself was not documented was a problem. I was concerned about how I was going to be able to send her to school without proper documentation because she was already six years old. So, that was the other challenge that I had, thinking about where I would send my child to school, a child who was not born here and does not have proper documentation.

**Charlotte:** Before we go in-depth with the issue of your child, I want to know about the people you were working with in the jobs you did. You left your job as a domestic worker, worked at a salon where you were fired, then at another salon where you were given a hundred rand. Were the people you were working with South Africans or other foreigners?

**Faith:** Okay. The first salon where I worked, and from which I was fired, was owned by a Congolese man. He was not a local. The second salon, where I was receiving very little money, was owned by a local woman. The last one I worked at was owned by a woman from Congo. So, of the three salons, only one was owned by a South African woman.

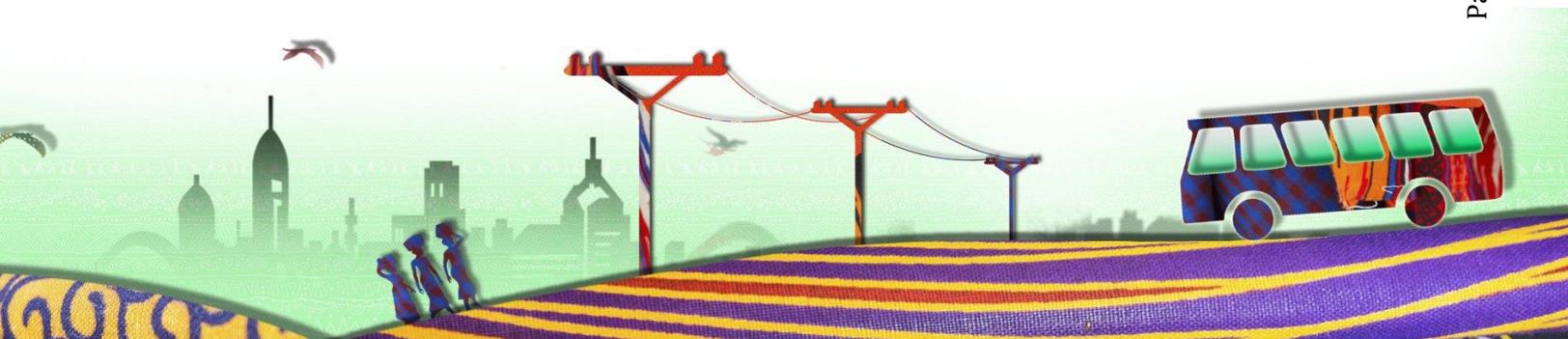
**Charlotte:** Okay. So, while working for the South African woman, were you also working with other local South Africans? How were your working relations?

**Faith:** Working with those people and especially with that woman, my biggest challenge was language. Yes, I had been staying here for a while, but I did not know the local language. So this is the first thing that would affect me everywhere I worked. Even when I was employed by the Congolese man the main issue was language because local people do not want to communicate in English. To use your own language only makes the situation worse because they don't understand. So, that is the other thing that troubled me while working. You know, sometimes when people are talking and you can't hear them, you end up thinking that maybe they are talking about you. Sometimes you end up feeling that you don't fit in, that you are not part of any process. Sometimes I would think that I ended up receiving a hundred rand at the end of the week because we had not understood each other during negotiations. Maybe there was something I said wrong or something I misunderstood. From what I could see, we did not understand each other and language differences affected how we did the job. I saw that what I was used to at home was different from how they worked here.

**Charlotte:** How did you feel after working for an entire week, thinking that you would receive better money for the work, and only receiving a hundred rand?

**Faith:** Firstly, I was really affected because it was not the first time I was working in a salon or plaiting hair. I felt that I was being put down. It was as if they did not know that I worked hard and that I also needed to use that money at home. I was really hurt ... argghhh ... and I asked myself if I had done something wrong. But I am very happy that I decided not to remain there. I saw that it was better to go somewhere else because I knew I could do the job and that I was a hard worker, and I knew that receiving a hundred rand was really putting me down.

**Charlotte:** Going back to the story of your child. You said that she came the very same way you came. Can you explain how your child got to Durban when she did not have proper documentation?





**Faith:** Eeeeh ... it was really hard, but as a parent I had to make it happen. I had a lot of contacts through people I had met and worked with. I spoke to the people at home and asked them to make a deal with a bus driver. At that time Pioneer bus still had a direct route to Durban, without a stop-over in Johannesburg. So she took that bus. If she had have taken a bus that made stops, she would have been lost. I managed to talk to the bus driver and ask him to ensure that she crossed the border without a problem. I paid a lot of money so that she would be able to travel alone and she was very young. She was almost six years old and for her to have travelled such a long distance alone it was really challenging. But I managed to communicate with the driver and she got here safely.

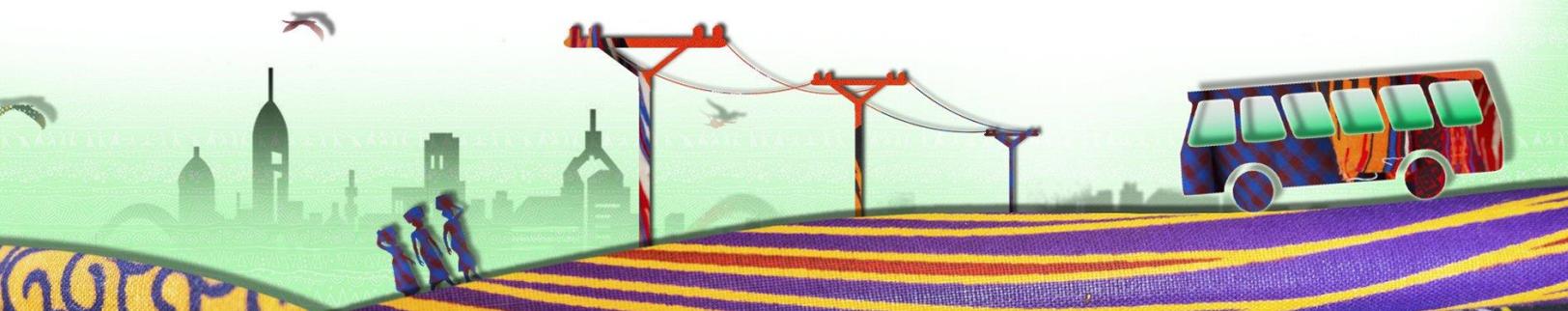
**Charlotte:** As a mother, how did that make you feel, knowing that your child was in the hands of strangers and expecting that she would arrive?

**Faith:** (laughing) It was hard. I was working in a job that required me to be there constantly. If I did not show up at work, then I would not get money. If I was not in the salon, my customers would go elsewhere and I would not have earned the money I paid to the drivers when they got here with my child. So, I felt comfort knowing that they would not fail to bring my child and that they were constantly updating me throughout the journey. So it wasn't too hard. I was very lucky because my child did not trouble them a lot on the journey. She loves to travel and she was enjoying herself. I took comfort from that, knowing that my child had been taken good care of by my mother and that now she was in good hands.

But I did not know the people who were bringing her. I was not related to them and anything could have happened to put my child at risk of getting stolen. It was hard. You know, we always hear stories of people who were assisted to cross the border illegally and how children were stolen. I don't know if you have ever come across such stories. Sometimes when people cross the border illegally and someone takes a child, sometimes they make it there without the child. That really worried me. I waited the whole day for my child to get here. I was thinking that other people's children had been stolen and now my child was travelling alone. I heard from a certain woman while we were just sitting and relaxing that she came with another woman, not by bus, but through the Limpopo River. She said the river was very full and people were being swept away. One of the women she was with had a baby girl. A man offered to carry the child saying that it was going to be pointless for both mother and child to get swept away. So the woman allowed him to help with the child. When they got to the other side the woman could not find the man who had the child. They looked for the child everywhere, but because of the situation, they could not go to the police. So things were hard for me, thinking that if this woman's child was stolen while she was there, what could happen to my child who was alone with drivers that I had asked to assist? I was very worried and when she got here I really felt relieved.

**Charlotte:** How did your mother respond when you told her that you had decided to take your child and that she was supposed to hand her over to the drivers?

**Faith:** I don't want to lie. You know how grandmothers are when it comes to the issue of their grandchildren. She was not happy—she will not hear of anything bad happening to her grandchild. She even proposed that it was better for my young sister to come with the child, but I told her that with the way I had struggled in 2008, it was going to be really difficult for me if my sister came before I had a stable job. So we did not get along for a while over that issue because she had said that since I was receiving better money, it was better for me to send some home while she took care of my child than to take the child when she did not have travel papers and when she was supposed to travel with strangers. She was not happy. She thought that I did not appreciate the way she was taking care of my child, or that I was no longer capable of taking care of my child because I was now in Durban. Or she





thought that I felt I was better able to take care of my child during hard times. For a while she was not happy. Sometimes I think she was really hurt because I took her grandchild. But because she is advanced in age I thought that asking her to bring the child was going to be really hard for her.

**Charlotte:** You brought up another issue. When your child came she did not have proper documentation and she was almost six years old, so it became really difficult to send her to school. Did you finally manage to enroll her in a crèche or school and how did you do that?

**Faith:** I first managed to send her to crèche (pre-school). Those days people who managed crèches were not concerned about documents. They just wanted money. For me it was really easy to drop off my child at crèche while on my way to work. After work I would go and pick her up. Sometimes when I finished early, I would go and wait for her and then we would go home. But when it came to sending her to school, I just did what most people who are here do: I bought fake documents. Schools do not check whether the papers are real or fake, so that option worked for me. That is how my child started going to school. She started late though, but she is still going.

**Charlotte:** From the time you started living with your child up until now, what are some of the challenges you face here in Durban? It might be things you encounter on the streets or anywhere else that really affect you.

**Faith:** Ummm ... okay. I'm the sort of person who is not concerned with a lot of things. I wake up, go to work and then come back home. But even if you are [such a person], you still have to face things that happen. Last year or the year before, there was a time when I even failed to go to work. I live in town and I work in town, but one day I failed to go to work because local people were singing and they were holding knives because of xenophobia. I just couldn't accept that someone with the same skin as mine and the same brain as mine, a person who might have had to overcome a lot like I did, would not want me to succeed. That is something that really held me back. I spent almost the whole week without going to work because I knew that where I work we are just foreigners. This meant that if these people decided to destroy and the like, they would target us because they already knew that the area is full of foreigners. So that is one of the things I am not happy with. My desire is that my child grows up in an environment that does not have too much hatred like here. So far that is the only challenge I face. As a person that saw it happening, I live with a bit of fear inside that it might happen again.

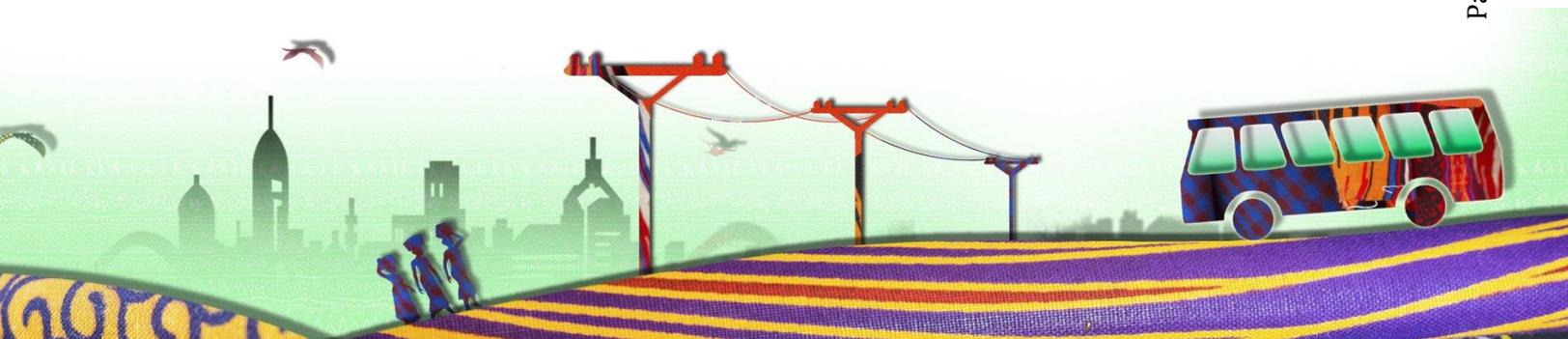
**Charlotte:** I really want to hear about your husband who came here 2007 and never went back home again. Do you still think he is alive and that you will see each other again? What do you think about that?

**Faith:** Ehhhh ... right now ... right now (getting a little emotional) ... I would be lying if I don't say that I think about it. There are some days when I wish that I could see him to ask him why he just disappeared like that. When I left his parent's home in 2008, the people there had said that they could not keep me there as a daughter-in-law when they did not even know if my husband was alive. So, yes, I would like to know where he is and I would really like him to see how much our child has grown. So that's the other thing I desire: I just want to know why he forgot us, me and his family and his child, since he got here.

**Charlotte:** As your child has grown up here, has she ever asked you where her father is?

**Faith:** Yes, she asks. There are some days when she asks. Ehhhh ... that question is really difficult for me because it makes me realise that as my child is growing. She will continue to ask and I won't have the answer, since I don't know where he is. But she asks.

**Charlotte:** Can you tell me how your life is now?





**Faith:** Right now, if I compare where I was when I first came to where I am now, I can see that my life is better. I can see that I fought many battles. I have encountered so many problems, but I am living a better life than when I came. On top of that, I am living better than I would have been in Zimbabwe because things were so hard when I was there in 2008. I never thought I would be able to take care of my child the way I'm taking care of her now. So I think my life is better now.

**Charlotte:** Since you said your life is better now, can you tell me some specific things that were really hard for you before, but have really changed?

**Faith:** It might seem as a joke, like things that are really not important, but just being able to buy soap was really hard, especially in 2008. We used the same soap for laundry, bathing and washing dishes. My life is better in that I am just able to take care of myself now. In 2008 I could not even afford to buy food. Even before 2008, when I was still with my husband, grocery shopping was difficult. So since I am now able to buy some things that I couldn't before, and my life has become better.

**Charlotte:** I just want to know about your friend who brought you to Durban, the one who was from church and you lived with where you first lived. Is she still around, and how is your relationship now?

**Faith:** Ehhh ... yes, my friend is around, but it's been a while. Sometimes she goes to Johannesburg and sometimes to Zimbabwe. It's been a while since I saw her, but I know she is well. Now we just remind each other about the time we were living at that place (Chibharuma) and now we are both living better lives.

**Charlotte:** Did your friend manage to move from that place?

**Faith:** Yes, she left and was living in some township in Umlazi. Then she left and was living here in town when I last saw her, but she has since gone to Johannesburg.

**Charlotte:** Is there anything I forgot to ask you, that you might want to tell me about your life here in Durban?

**Faith:** No, I think you asked everything and I have spoken about everything I encountered since the day I came here.

**Charlotte:** I just want to thank you for granting me permission to ask you about the story of your life. I want to thank you and to say God bless you as you continue to live your life.

**Faith:** Thank you.

