

# EMMANUEL

**A  
MUST  
READ!**



## **LIFE WITHOUT KIDNEYS**

Emmanuel has gone through three (3) unsuccessful kidney transplants, fourteen (14) life threatening operations, dialysis from 2002 and is still optimistic. This is a true story of courage, determination, hope and faith in God.

**Author: Stephen G. Kimotho**

# **EMMANUEL**

## **LIFE WITHOUT KIDNEYS**

**The Life Story  
of  
Emmanuel Gitau**

**Stephen G. Kimotho**

**Edition II, 2020**



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## **Preface**

### ***Three kidney Transplants, 14 surgical operations, dialysis from 2002 and still optimistic***

Emmanuel Njaci Gitau has been to hospitals more times than he can remember. He has gone through three kidney transplants, 14 major operations and has been on dialysis since 2002. After years of suffering, one day on a hospital bed in India, the doctors delivered the worst news to Emmanuel: Both of his kidneys had failed and he had about three months to live. However, not even such news could vanquish his courage, faith in God and determination to live.

In this unique life account, Emmanuel narrates his story of great pain, tribulations, perseverance and insurmountable trust and faith in God. The book captures fear, courage, triumphs and doubts, as experienced by Emmanuel and other family members. The story of Emmanuel presents to you a blend of accounts that delve deep into the lived experiences of a kidney patient and his family members, as they go through various stages of renal illness.

This memorable story is evidence of the amazing love and grace of God. Indeed, Emmanuel is a living testimony of the love and goodness of God. In every dimension of his life, the glorious love of God shines through this young man's life.

Emmanuel's life can be summarized in three words: Determination, hope and persistence. He seems to have understood the art of persistence and perseverance. The will to go on, even during life's most difficult terrains, indeed marks the difference between failure and success. As James Whitcomb Riley observed, the most essential factor in life is persistence – the determination that never allows one's energy or enthusiasm to be drained by the discouragements that inevitably visit us in life.

## **Aim of this Book**

The purpose of this book is to tell the story of Emmanuel: Describing the experiences of his life of courage, determination, hope and faith as a renal patient. Through this story, Emmanuel hopes to enlighten people about the benefits of trusting God at all times, in addition to highlighting the plight of people who suffer from terminal renal failure.

There are hundreds of people in Kenya – and the rest of the world – who are at the brink of despair because they or their relatives suffer from kidney failure and other related ailments. The management of the medical condition surrounding renal failure is both psychologically and physically debilitating. It is hoped that the story of Emmanuel will be a springboard of hope to many families in the desert of hopelessness that is often created by the frustrations of renal diseases.

This book will go beyond capturing the physical and psychological pain that renal patients go through and hopefully inspire, encourage, and illustrate the importance of faith in oneself as well as faith and trust in God during such trying moments.

This book is not necessarily a plea for sympathy; rather, it is a proclamation of hope in life and an ascertainment of faith in God even in the most desperate situations that people face.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

*"Without faith, hope and trust, there is no promise for the future, and without a promising future, life has no direction, no meaning and no justification."*

**—Adlin Sindair**

Faced by so many complicated challenges, many people would easily give up in life. But for Emmanuel, life is about overcoming and learning to overcome the challenges we face every day. Put together, these tiny triumphs make one huge complete story of victory.

Emmanuel has gone through unexplainable physical, psychological and social tribulation. But for him, it is not what happens to him that matters so much. It is what he does with what happens to him that counts. He argues that some of the things people face in this world are inevitable. One day a person gets sick. Another day, the same person gets hungry or gets accused wrongly by his or her adversaries. To Emmanuel, this is not what matters most in life – it is what an individual does with what befalls them. That is what is important. Unfortunately, we often miss this crucial point.

When individuals tumble and fall, they have a number of things they can do: They can decide to lie down there, cry and attract sympathy from passers-by. But they could also decide to rise up, dust themselves and walk on to their destinations, as if nothing had happened. The worst thing is to imagine that people will always be empathetic about your condition. The truth is that they will not. But even worse is to live with hoarded past failures. "Life must go on," Emmanuel repeats over and over in this account of his lived experiences.

No one likes suffering. Even Jesus prayed in agony, "...remove this cup from me." No one wants to drink from this cup. But for one to truly understand the "meaning" of drinking from this cup, such a person must be ready to surrender and pray as Jesus did, "Not my will but yours, Father." As Emmanuel narrates this story, the meaning of this prayer by

Jesus becomes clearer. It is a prayer that meant a lot to him. These words, indeed significantly, have influenced his interpretation of suffering in his own life.

Emmanuel has a very unique view about suffering. He believes that suffering has a purpose to it – that there is a lesson that God wants us to learn through our difficult experiences. "Though no one would love to suffer, it is a fact of life. It is like the air we breathe. It hangs around us like a shadow at noon," says Emmanuel.

"It does not matter how cautious we are in life, nor how we put together a good life. No matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy and successful in our careers, something inevitable comes around and messes with our peace – our peace of mind, body and soul." This is what Emmanuel calls suffering.

Humans are averse to suffering. But suffering also offers great learning opportunities. "You don't have to like someone to learn from him or her; you don't have to like something to learn from it; you don't have to like suffering to draw some invaluable lessons from it," Emmanuel argues.

From Emmanuel's perspectives, suffering presents to us valuable lessons of life. Suffering has opened his spiritual eyes and driven him deeper into the love of God. It has unleashed a deep-seated passion for God's word. Suffering has empowered him and replenished his spiritual power and thirst for godliness and holiness.

Emmanuel talks with certainty about a special love for God. It is this glowing love in his heart that sustains him through all his physical tribulations. He talks about it to both Christians and non-Christians alike. It is this deep-seated love that makes all the difference in his life. Every day, Emmanuel wakes up with a smile to face the challenges of the day with courage and determination, because he knows he cannot lose this "great love of God" even in death. This is how he puts it:

"Brother, sometimes challenges come our way to chastise us, to help us learn new lessons from our messy past. Some challenges come our way to serve as a lesson to ourselves and others, to pre-empt future



pitfalls. I have suffered throughout my life, but I know that, just like Job suffered, there will be a good ending to this; in the end, our God will restore my glory. It is this faith that keeps me going. I constantly pray that, not my will but His be done. If it pleases him, one day my kidneys will spring back to life for his own glory."

A moment with Emmanuel will most likely convince anyone that he is indeed a walking miracle. He values every little thing that happens to his life. I remember one day when he asked me:

"My brother, do you ever thank God after answering a short call of nature?

I asked him, "Why do you ask?" He smiled. From his thoughtful glance, I knew he had something he wanted to share with me:

"My friend, "he continued, " from 2002 I have been ill, i have not had the luxury of answering a short call of nature. Everytime i see my nephew do this thing, i thanks God for him n all who do so even on the road side, I do the sign of the cross and tell God thanks. It is awesome to appreciate these seemingly obvious things. Most of the time we only come to realize how valuable such things are when they are taken away from us, " he concludes and laughs with me.

Those are deep insights about life. Emmanuel is a blessed and wise person. Talking to him makes one reflect more and more about their own life. It makes one alive about the plight of others in the community.

## First Dreadful Night

*"Faith is not knowing what the future holds, but knowing who holds the future"*  
—Unknown Author

"One Saturday, I woke up in the wee hours of the night feeling completely worn out. I had a running stomach and felt a bit dizzy. I was a small boy then, and could hardly understand what was happening to me. I woke my parents up and they decided to rush me to the nearest hospital. But as I prepared for hospital, I collapsed and passed out in the bathroom." That is how Emmanuel begun the account of his recollection, on how he got his first appointment with the surgeon at a very young age.

"I can't recall for how long I was unconscious," he continues. "But, soon, I realized that I wasn't in the bathroom anymore. My head was heavy and my eyes dizzy, and they would hardly open. As I regained consciousness, I began to hear some faint intermittent beeps. The beeps grew louder and louder, and as I slowly opened my eyes, I saw numerous tubes all over my body. Some individuals, in white overalls, were standing next to my bed, gazing at me with concerted attention, like I had become the last specimen in a scientific laboratory. Finally, I got to know, I was in Kijabe Hospital.

I could hardly tell what had happened to me, or what was wrong with me. But, after several tests, the doctors concluded that I needed to go through an urgent operation. The fear and anxiety all over my parents' faces, suddenly made me apprehensive. Something wasn't right. But what? What had they discovered? These and many more questions whirled freely, through my young mind, like the winds of the desert. I had no answers and I had to wait for someone to explain everything to me. But I held on strongly to my faith in Christ, entrusted my destiny to God and fully surrendered to His will. From my young age my dear parents had impressed upon me the importance of living according to the will of God.

This was Emmanuel's first encounter with the surgeons. But, how was Emmanuel's life as a child?

## **The Birth of a Boy**

"When time came for Emmanuel to be born, I was at my place of work," explained Emmanuel's father. "I was an accountant back then with a firm in Nairobi. My job was very demanding and left little time for me to move around. We used to work late, and that day was not an exception. It took me long to get home, so my cousin stepped in and took my wife to the hospital. By the time I made it to the hospital, a baby boy had been born. I looked at the handsome boy and was overjoyed. This is the boy we later christened Emmanuel. I loved this name and it meant a lot to me. "Emmanuel" has its origin from the Bible (Mathew 1:23) and means 'God with us'." As he narrated, Emmanuel's father exuded a smile as memories of that day flooded into his mind.

According to Gitau, Emmanuel's father, the baby grew up to become a bouncing toddler, active and healthy. "As a little boy, he was just what you would want to see in a little boy. He generally looked very promising," he said, albeit in a pensive mood.

Eliud Mumo, Emmanuel's eldest brother, describes Emmanuel as one of the most energetic boys he knew. "He would play continuously for hours with almost equal spits of anger and joy."

According to family members, Emmanuel had no major illnesses that would have worried a parent. He often suffered from common colds, like any other child.

One moment, however, remains engraved in the memory of Emmanuel's mother. The boy was just a few days old. The whole family had retired for the night as usual after a long and hearty chat with Emmanuel's grandmother, who had visited the family at the time to congratulate them for the new baby. Emmanuel's mother could not remember how long they had slept, but their peaceful night was cut short by an ear-piercing shriek from young Emmanuel. It was one sharp and loud scream, and then he kept quiet. Apprehensive, Emmanuel's mother switched on the lights to establish what was troubling her son.

One look at the baby made her realize that something was terribly wrong. The baby's eyes popped out like two well-lit stars in the sky, as he constantly struggled for breath. This was indeed a scary moment. She quickly woke up her husband and Emmanuel's grandmother, and asked them to examine the baby. Her husband did not waste time to say anything, but dashed out to look for means of transport to the nearest hospital. His instinct had already told him that the situation was dire. Soon, the parents were on their way to the Aga Khan Hospital.

On arrival, the doctor quickly examined the baby as Emmanuel's mother hysterically narrated what had happened. The doctor immersed the boy in a basin full of water and he sprang back to life. This sudden illness shocked the two parents, but perhaps what was more intriguing was the method the doctor chose to resolve their riddle.

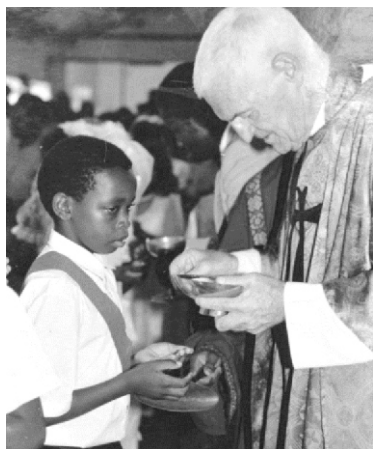
"I cannot remember if this doctor gave any prescription, but soon thereafter, we were on the road again heading home, sooner than we had expected. The boy was fine," exclaimed Emmanuel's mother in a wry laughter as she recalled the turn of events.

Baby Emmanuel was nothing but jovial and comical. Plump, energetic and full of life, he thought of himself as a body builder and would not waste a chance to display his muscles, as he had seen professional body builders do on television. He loved the local comedians of the time such as *Masanduku*, whom he kept on imitating. He liked making everybody laugh. The joyful person that he displays today, despite his illness, is his innate character. He loves being happy and always wants others to be happy. Unlike his other siblings who are a bit reserved, Emmanuel has always been a source of humour for the whole family, right from a young age.

Throughout his primary school life, Emmanuel was a healthy and normal boy. As Emmanuel's mother put it, there were no major health incidents that could be strongly linked to his current state.



*Father Robert baptizing Emmanuel at the Assumption of Mary catholic church, Umoja One Estate in Nairobi*



*Emmanuel receiving his first holy communion from Father George at Assumption of Mary Catholic Church, Umoja, Nairobi.*



*Second from right, Emmanuel with friends in class eight at Kanvale Academy, Nairobi*

## How Did it all Begin?

*"A grateful heart is a beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being."*  
—James E. Faust

Like any other child, Emmanuel would contract flu once in a while, and after medication, the boy would recover and continue with his normal life. However, a few instances, the parents felt that the incidences of flu were becoming too frequent and decided to change the doctor they had been visiting.

One day Emmanuel's mother recounted a very interesting story that left me with a number of questions. Could Emmanuel's problem have started here?

"I remember one day we visited this doctor in the city and got some prescriptions for flu. Emmanuel's condition did not get better even after taking the prescribed drugs. In fact, it got worse. My son began to pass stool tainted with blood, and a lot of blood for that matter. This was very scary for us. It was hard to tell what would have caused that kind of internal bleeding. We rushed the boy to hospital and he got admitted at Guru Nanak Hospital in Nairobi.

After a week-long admission, Emmanuel was fine again and as jumpy and jovial as ever. I presumed everything was going to be fine again. I do not recall any other incident that was as scary as that one for the number of years we lived in the city. We later moved to Kiambu County, about 30 km from the city centre.

After settling in Kiambu, Emmanuel got another bout of flu, which turned out to be very serious. We were new in Kiambu, but a kind neighbour directed us to a doctor in the area. The new doctor prescribed some drugs. Unfortunately, Emmanuel's condition deteriorated. We took the boy back to the same doctor and informed him of the development. The doctor, however, insisted that the boy should continue with the same drugs, because they were the best for the condition he was suffering from. We continued administering the

prescription, though half-heartedly." According to Emmanuel's parents, that was around October 1999.

Emmanuel's condition did not improve. He kept on complaining of stomach pains. "Unknown to us, this new doctor had prescribed the same drug that had led to internal bleeding and his consequent admission at Guru Nanak Hospital for a week. Perhaps that is why parents should take an interest in the medicines prescribed for their children. It is important to understand what medicine causes adverse reactions to your children," says Emmanuel's father, shaking his head.

Two days later, very early in the morning, Emmanuel's mother was awoken by some strange noises of items falling and crashing in the washroom, followed by sharp screams that died almost instantly: "Dad! Dad! Help! Help!" Emmanuel's Father rushed to the washroom to establish what was going on. The door was not fastened from inside. He pushed it open, and what he saw made his heart skip a beat. The toilet bowl was red with blood, with the boy as sprawled on the floor, unconscious.

There was no time to figure out what had happened. Shortly, Mumo, Emmanuel's elder brother, joined the dad and they lifted Emmanuel and prepared him for the journey to the hospital. It was clear that something was terribly wrong with Emmanuel's health. There was little talk on the way as Emmanuel was rushed to the family doctor's clinic for preliminary help and advice. Throughout the journey, the boy slumped in and out of consciousness. The family doctor quickly administered first aid to the boy and advised the family to proceed to Kijabe Hospital which was well equipped to handle such an emergency.

On arrival at Kijabe, Emmanuel's case was treated as an emergency. The first response was to have the boy connected to a blood transfusion unit. He had lost a lot of blood and perhaps continued to lose more because of the internal bleeding.

"I was deeply disturbed by Emmanuel's sudden illness and could not accompany them to the hospital," narrated Emmanuel's mother as she recalled the events of the day. "This was one of the longest days in my life as I waited for them to come back. There were no mobile phones at



the time, so I could not establish what was happening to my son," Emmanuel's mother narrated sorrowfully.

## **Urgent Operation**

Emmanuel had indeed lost a lot of blood. Later on, the lead doctor disclosed to Emmanuel that he was actually surviving on less than a half of the blood required in his system and that this was very risky. According to the family, Emmanuel received 11 pints of blood. After a thorough diagnosis, the doctor recommended that the boy needed an urgent operation to stop the internal bleeding in the stomach.

The turn of events profoundly astounded Emmanuel's father. He could hardly understand why such misfortunes were happening to his beloved son, Emmanuel.

As Eunice (Emmanuel's eldest sister) puts it, everyone in the family was worried. "No one in the family had gone through theatre processes before. Surprisingly, Emmanuel didn't look as worried as we were; he still smiled and urged us to be courageous," added Eunice as she recalled the details of that day.

"Emmanuel happens to be this kind of person who would never want to burden others with his personal problems. He would seldom want to stir people's emotions with his problems. He always preferred concealing his emotions, rather than letting them become the subject of sympathy from his family members or friends," Eunice says.

As the family gathered around him, the mood was gloomy and pensive. The atmosphere in the room was tense. Emmanuel's father took the lead and urged the family to allow the doctor do what he could. "Let's put God in the middle of this, allow Him to take over and to be with Emmanuel."

But there was one thing the family wanted to do before wheeling Emmanuel into the theatre: pray and anoint him with holy oil. This was both Emmanuel's and the family's desire at the time. Mumo recounts, "We frantically looked for priests' numbers to call and luckily got one – a

priest from a neighbouring parish. We requested the priest to come and pray with the family before the theatre procedures and he accepted."

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As the day wore on, Emmanuel's mother joined the rest of the family. Eunice constantly observed her mother and noted, "My mother was very disturbed by the turn of events. She could hardly pray. I guess she just couldn't stand the suspense. She just had to be there. Luckily, she arrived just before Emmanuel was wheeled away into the theatre room. The mood was sombre as we gathered around the boy to pray. It felt like letting go of a beloved one to an unknown destiny. Tears flowed down our cheeks freely as we prayed. But we prayed anyway."

Emmanuel's father was also greatly affected by the events of the day. But he had to remain strong, show courage and be an example of hope. He was aware that the whole family was keenly observing his reactions, too.

"The doctor examined the boy further, and kept throwing quick glances at me, perhaps waiting for my reaction. He was a kind doctor, and in the short conversation we had, I pleaded with him to assist my son in any way he could. I said to him, 'we have come to this hospital because we need your assistance; help us, the best way you can,'" said Emmanuel's father.

The family watched as Emmanuel was wheeled into the theatre. Many unanswered questions flashed through his father's mind, while many thoughts bolted him into a state of almost utter mental confusion. But he opted to trust in God. He says, "I remember a prayer I whispered to God at that very moment:

'Emmanuel is a gift from you, Sovereign Lord. I have done everything to bring him up as a parent. Now, sovereign God, do as you please with Emmanuel. Be the doctor and work on Emmanuel. Let your glory be seen through this boy.'

The whole family gathered at Kijabe Hospital's visitor's shade and prayed earnestly as they eagerly awaited the outcome of the theatre

process. Friends and relatives stood with Emmanuel's family in prayers and material support. As Emmanuel's father reports, "God hears prayers. Emmanuel went through the operation successfully."

After a long wait, Emmanuel's father got in and found the surgeon who had operated on Emmanuel in his small office. The doctor informed him that Emmanuel was doing much better and that he had regained consciousness.

Perhaps the doctor could not imagine what such good news meant to the anxious parent. "I felt a wave of relief brush across my whole body as he took me to a glass-walled room, which I later came to know was the Intensive Care Unit. I was not allowed into the room but I could see Emmanuel through the glass wall. He was lying still on his bed with numerous tubes connected to his mouth. It was a great relief to see my son alive again," exclaimed Emmanuel's father.

A short while later, when the family members had an opportunity to see the boy through the glass wall, the doctor explained to them that it would take some time before Emmanuel could fully recover from the effect of the drugs.

Emmanuel stayed in the hospital for three more days and on the fourth day, he was discharged from hospital. Everyone in the family was amazed by the quick recovery and grateful to God. From then on, Emmanuel's health drastically improved day by day.

As the days went by, and as Emmanuel's health improved, the family was certain that the tragic morning that sent Emmanuel to the theatre for the first time, in his young life, was nothing but a bad dream. Little did they know that this was just an initiation to a string of other horrendous and nerve-racking moments for them. More than ever before, they would need that extra ounce of the faith that they had hung onto at Kijabe Hospital.

## **After Kijabe**

After the operation at Kijabe Hospital, Emmanuel was equally delighted by the progress in his recovery, as he narrated to me: "A few hours later, I was out of the theatre and all looked fine. In fact, I was confident that that was the end of my troubles. Yes, indeed, my health improved tremendously, and for many days, I continued with normal life like anyone else."

One year later, Emmanuel's health started deteriorating again. He would constantly get ill and the family would take him to the family doctor. When his condition remained largely unchanged, they decided to take him back to the same doctor at Kijabe hospital. The doctor treated Emmanuel and gave him some prescriptions to take home with him. A few days later, they had to go back.

"One day, during a visit to Kijabe Hospital for my usual post-operation treatment, the doctors noted a sharp rise in blood pressure. This was an indication that something was wrong. The doctor went on to inform me that I could be having some renal complications and needed the opinion of a renal expert. I couldn't tell what the doctor observed to make such a conclusion. However, I can say with certainty, that that pronouncement marked the beginning of my bumpiest journey as a kidney patient. "It never occurred to me at that moment what the doctor's pronouncement meant. I thought it was another medical discovery that would finally settle my woes. But I later came to realize that it was actually the beginning of my woes. No one could imagine, even remotely, the complicated and fierce battles that lay ahead. It is incredible when I look back at the whole journey."

## **First Dialysis Session**

"I came to know that the 'renal problem' diagnosed at Kijabe was indeed a serious situation when Dr. Joshua Kayima, a renal specialist, advised me that I needed an immediate admission to the Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) Renal Unit and be introduced to a process called dialysis," says Emmanuel.

Following Dr. Joshua Kayima's referral, the family members decided to take Emmanuel to Nairobi Hospital instead, where they thought he would receive medical attention faster. However, the doctors at the Nairobi hospital supported Dr. Kayima's decision and further referred Emmanuel to KNH, the biggest national and referral hospital in Kenya.

"On arrival at KNH, we handed our documents to the medical officer on duty and after a brief scan at the medical records, he gasped in shock. This happened with most of his colleagues who cared to pick the documents and glance at them. This scared us stiff," said Emmanuel. "What is going on here?" Eunice wondered. No one answered her despite the fact that almost all the family members had the same question on their minds. Finally, a renal doctor came just as we were trying to reel out of the maze of the thoughts and worries. He too looked shocked, but unlike the other medical staff, he took a few minutes to shed some light into the matter.

The doctor explained that the body produces some chemical called potassium, which is normally removed by the kidney from the body together with urea in urine. When kidneys fail to execute this role, potassium could accumulate and poison the whole body. He further added that, in Emmanuel's case, the potassium level in his blood system was dangerously high.

Aah! So, that is why the nurses were gasping in shock. They didn't expect a patient with such high levels of potassium to be walking around. Often, such a case is treated as an emergency and the person is wheeled into the dialysis room. The doctor also cautioned us that such levels of potassium in the body could be fatal and the patient could collapse and die at any moment.

All this was indeed scaring and confusing for the family but they took it in stride. "In short, Emmanuel's blood system requires some urgent cleansing through a process called dialysis," the doctor explained.

A wheel chair was immediately provided and Emmanuel was wheeled into the renal ward. A complicated procedure of inserting a thin flexible tube into the body to permit introduction or withdrawal of fluids

began. Later, Emmanuel's father came to learn that these tubes are referred to as "catheters."

Myriads of thoughts went through Emmanuel's father's mind as he recounted later. "At first I was shocked. I didn't know how to react to the news. The term 'dialysis' was new to me. I requested the doctor to explain further about it and he did it kindly. He took me aside and gave me a substantial explanation. He also informed me that dialysis is often very expensive. At that moment, he informed us that the cost was at Ksh5,000 (\$50) per session. That was pretty high for me, but I did not complain because I thought it would be a one-time process and Emmanuel would not need to go through such a process later. If the doctor read my mind at that moment, he would have simply laughed at my naivety.

Later, the doctor requested us to leave Emmanuel in the hospital for the night to allow for further tests. Emmanuel had been through many medical tests; therefore, we were not alarmed by the request.



*Emmanuel undergoing through the dialysis process*

"As my son Mumo and I left the precincts of KNH, a lot of things whirled wildly in our mind. At the back of my mind, I was disturbed by the turn of the events."

The arrival of Mumo and his dad at home without Emmanuel did not amuse his mother, who had been anxiously waiting for the trio. After exchanging niceties, Emmanuel's father explained to her, as quietly as he could, about what had transpired. She resignedly accepted what had happened. A sad atmosphere hung in the house, like a precarious cloud before a storm. But what bothered Emmanuel's mother was the prayer Emmanuel's father made that evening:

*"Ngai ni ngatho niundu wa matuku macio utuhete na mwana ucio..."*  
(Lord God we thank you for all those days we have lived with this child...).

"That line struck me like lightning," recalled Emmanuel's mother, "I wondered if my son was actually alive or dead. Is Emmanuel's father trying to pass the message of the demise of my son through this prayer? I could hardly wait for the prayers to end. I confronted my elder son Mumo:

'Mumo!' I called anxiously... 'Tell me, where is Emmanuel?'

My son Mumo, a very polite young man, calmly replied, 'Mum, we left Emmanuel at Kenyatta hospital for medical attention.'

'Are you sure?' I asked him.

'Yes, mum!' he responded.

I informed them that I would accompany my son Mumo the following day as he went to take breakfast to him. My husband must have understood my fears and anxieties. He reminded me that the hospital would only allow us into the ward at noon. I was not bothered by that. I was ready to wait at the door till noon. If I had my own means that night, I would have left them behind and gone to the hospital to confirm if my son was still alive," recalled Emmanuel's mother.

Emmanuel's mother could hardly wait for the dawn. She mumbled several prayers as she went on with her morning chores, seeking courage and strength from God to face the realities of the day. A lot of thoughts swept through her mind like Savannah winds.

"I was on my feet for the better part of the morning, anxious and



scared," she recalled. "Finally, the moment came and we made our journey to the hospital. As I entered the hospital, my heart was thumping hard. I didn't know what to expect. As soon as we got into the ward, I quickly and anxiously threw glances from one corner of the ward looking for him. Finally, my eyes rested on his face. Yes, he was there alive and kicking. In fact, he was so much engrossed in a conversation with a lady who had also come for dialysis, that he didn't notice us get into the ward. It's only then that my heart relaxed. Later that day, I informed Emmanuel's father how he scared me with the prayer he said the previous evening and we all laughed about it."

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## The Announcement: Terminal Renal Failure

*"The truth is, we know so little about life, we don't really know what the good news is and what the bad news is."*  
— Kurt Vonnegut

As the beeps from the dialysis machine continued intermittently during his four hours of dialysis, Emmanuel still held on to his faith – that one day his kidneys will function normally for God's own glory.

"I hoped that was the last time I would visit Kenyatta National Hospital, at least for such a procedure. Little did I know that KNH would become like my second home. After several tests and visits to Kenyatta National Hospital, one doctor dropped the bomb shell: I was suffering from kidney failure," recalled Emmanuel pensively.

The news was distressing to everyone in the family. But what distressed Emmanuel's mother more was how the news was delivered to the young man. She felt that the sad news should have been broken to the boy in a better way. "I think the doctor thought of Emmanuel as a grown up. But he was still a kid despite the physique. The doctor simply dropped the bomb shell and never thought of the trauma that would cause to the young man's life," Emmanuel's mother griped.

"I will never forget that day. I had never seen my boy that badly shaken, as he narrated the bad news to me. He had just arrived from the hospital and he looked rather tired and sad. He slumped on the couch like a heap of worthless clothes, coiled himself like a frightened kitten seeking protection from the realities of the day. Then, in a deep and near hoarse voice, he told me the exact words that the doctor had used: '*Emmanuel, you have a kidney condition that is irreversible. What I mean is that, one that cannot be cured,*' that is what the doctor told me, mum," he said as he gazed up, lost in thought," recalled Emmanuel's mother.

It was heart-wrenching to see her once jovial and comical son coil himself in a coach in fear and anxiety. "I guess the information spelt doom to the young man. That day my heart was heavy, very heavy with sadness and concern for him."

She approached him and asked him, 'Who has told you that you have a terminal kidney condition?'

"That is what the doctor says, mum," he replied. She knew at that point that she had to be strong and reassure him that all was not lost.

"I asked him to sit up and I started counting to him all the people I could remember who had kidney condition. "Son, listen to me, Emmanuel: Dr. Richard Leakey has lived for more than 20 years since the time he was diagnosed with a kidney condition; Bishop Gerishon Kirima has a kidney condition but he is still going strong and many other people in the country. Emmanuel, I urge you to ignore such proclamations. It is only God who gives and takes life. Remember, we have always trusted in God. Shall we stop trusting in Him?'

After our short talk, I realized that he had some peace of mind. I felt low, but I didn't want Emmanuel to notice that. Sometimes I would try to and could not. It was one of our lowest moments as a family," recounted Emmanuel's mother.

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Well, after receiving the tragic news of Emmanuel's kidney condition the family went to meet the same doctor the following day. The doctor continued to educate them more about dialysis. The doctor was aware that it was a phenomenon that would shape the life of this family in very significant ways. Nevertheless, he had no idea how drastic that could be.

"In Emmanuel's case, dialysis may continue throughout his entire life," the doctor said with a lot of sobriety. The news was not only heavy to bear, but also hard to comprehend for the family. Emmanuel's father looked at Emmanuel, then the doctor, and his heart sank.

"But what could I do? As a parent, this was the worst news for me and I believe it could have been the same for any other parent. It preoccupied my mind for a number of days. What could have caused such a misfortune to my boy? Like any other human being, the questions of "why" hovered over me like thirsty wild bees over a pool of water," noted Emmanuel's father.

"It was hard to tell what was going on in my wife's mind," Emmanuel's father continued, "She was standing next to us as we received this devastating news. I am sure the news was equally psychologically annihilating to her as it was to us all."

"At home, we tried to talk about the sudden turn of events but with little success. Everyone in the family was deeply engulfed in his or her own thoughts. It was a very trying moment for us."

This sad news hung all over the minds of Gitau's family like a dark, sinister cloud. They didn't say much, but they prayed more.

During the first few days, the dialysis process was not only strange but traumatizing too. Watching the doctor meticulously fix those tiny tubes into Emmanuel's body was a nerve-wracking experience, to say the least. But how was Emmanuel taking all this?

"I cannot recall what was going through my mind during such moments," observed Emmanuel, "but I remember seeing Mumo, my eldest brother, standing next to the machine, his gaze tightly fixed on the doctor as he operated the complex system. A lot must have been going through his mind as well. We were all silent. We had questions, dozens of them, swirling through our minds freely. None of us verbalized these questions within us. The whole ordeal was one long nightmare unfolding right in front of our very eyes."

Mumo, Emmanuel's eldest brother, was equally intrigued. "The sight of Emmanuel's blood moving inside the tiny tubes to and from the dialyzer, and the sorrowful beeps of the dialyzer, completed the most perturbing scene in our lives," observed Mumo as he recounted his experiences of that day. "My brother Emmanuel looked quite shocked, too. I would occasionally mumble some encouragement here and there, though I can't tell for sure if he was listening. But I did admire his courage; he took everything in stride.

He has faced numerous obstacles in his life in amazing ways, and I was optimistic he would traverse in this one, too."

As per the doctor's advice, the family proceeded to the dietician's office for another session on how to manage the diet of a renal patient. The dietician made it clearer to them about the magnitude of the tragedy that had hit the family. Besides informing them of the importance of adhering to a prescribed diet, he also informed them that this situation may last for a long time and hence it was important to pay attention to the diet. When they enquired on how this problem could be dealt with conclusively, for the first time the phrase, "kidney transplantation" came into play.

"I didn't pay attention to these terms since I did not expect Emmanuel's condition to persist and get to that level," disclosed Emmanuel's mother.

Emmanuel was quiet most of the time. It was hard to tell what was going through his mind. Emmanuel's mother constantly encouraged him: "Emmanuel, you know nothing passes behind God's back. Our God is fully aware of your situation and our situation as a family. Again, this condition shall not persist forever," she said to him.

Amazingly, this belief that Emmanuel's kidney will finally come round is one of the most profound beliefs I have heard from all the family members. They all separately confessed this belief to me. I have lost count of the instances when Emmanuel himself has repeated this to me.

"Emmanuel's kidneys may have shrunk but, let me tell you something, we strongly believe that God's grace can revive them. We strongly believe that this God we trust in, is alive. The God who performed miracles in those days of the Bible is alive and can still perform a miracle for Emmanuel, if it pleases Him. He brought back Lazarus who had been in his grave for four days. He was almost rotting. But God brought those rotting organs back to life. So if He wills, Emmanuel's kidney will come round and function normally," confessed Emmanuel's mother.

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## **Cake that Changed Emmanuel's Fortunes**

Sometime in April 2004, Emmanuel got an interesting friend. This was Pastor Hinga. Pastor David Hinga needed a birthday cake for his kids. Through all these hardships, Emmanuel had taken a catering course at the Kenya Polytechnic. However, it took him long to complete the course as he would often get hospitalized and consequently miss exams. Emmanuel is a generous person and so he offered to make the cake for the pastor.

As agreed, Emmanuel delivered the cake to the pastor. As the pastor handed the cash for the cake, Emmanuel declined to take it and informed him that he had decided to give the kids a treat. The pastor was very moved, mainly because he knew that Emmanuel needed that cash for dialysis and/or other uses.

After engaging in the normal chit-chat, pastor Hinga asked Emmanuel if he was still attending the dialysis sessions. Emmanuel informed him that it had become the only way out for him, if he was to live to see another day. It became apparent to Pastor Hinga that life for Emmanuel was like walking a tight-rope. For him, preparing and selling the cakes was not a hobby, it was the only means of raising money for dialysis. The pastor promised to visit Emmanuel's father, some day.

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True to his word, one day, Pastor Hinga and his wife visited the family. They discussed a couple of things. But what he was mostly interested in, was how the family managed to raise the Ksh5000 (\$50) dialysis fees per session, two sessions per week.

When it comes to Emmanuel's medical bill, no one would capture the scenario better than Emmanuel's father: "I had been paying for Emmanuel's medical bills for four years by the time Pastor Hinga visited us," observed Emmanuel's father. "It was clear to everyone in my family that the only way out of the predicament, for Emmanuel and the family in general, was to have him get a kidney transplant. We discussed this issue with Pastor Hinga and even floated a number of hospitals in which we could make further enquiries. Finally, we settled for a hospital in India,

but there was a problem. The price quoted for a kidney transplant by the hospital was about Ksh1.5 million (\$1,500). This was simply astronomical. There was no way we could raise that kind of money."

"We all knew this, but opted to remain silent about it," he continued after a brief moment of silence. "But, then, all of us were pretty aware about one thing: There was no room for giving up. Somehow, we had to get this money. I knew it was going to be a herculean task, but I decided to trust in God. Also, I was conscious of the fact that, as we looked for the transplant money, Emmanuel needed more money for his dialysis sessions.

I needed to share this with someone. No one could understand this better than Pastor Hinga. Therefore, I arranged for a meeting with him. In our discussions, I explained all the challenges I foresaw concerning the kidney transplant. In addition, I hinted to him that I intended to sell my small piece of land, to have Emmanuel treated. If that could solve Emmanuel's problem, I was willing to let go of any property, just to have the boy treated. Property means nothing to a family agonizing under such a tribulation of illness," observed Emmanuel's father, momentarily lost in thoughts.

Pastor Hinga was really moved by the desperate state of the family. He sympathized with them, but knew sympathies were not enough. He came up with the idea of a harambee (fundraising event). He believed that Emmanuel's predicament was no longer one family's affair. It was supposed to become a communal affair. The community needed to come in and help. The fact that Emmanuel's ever-escalating medical bill had outgrown the family's capability was no longer a secret. Pastor Hinga took the family through a plan on how to organize a simple fundraising event for Emmanuel.

A committee to organize the first fundraising was quickly formed. Family members and friends were very supportive. In October 2004, the first harambee was held. "On that day, I saw the hand of God intervene for us in a mighty way. The harambee raised exactly Ksh1.5 million, just the amount we required to take Emmanuel to India for the transplant," recalled Emmanuel's sister, Eunice.



In Kenya, the word harambee is often linked to political activities. This is because the politicians, more often than not, use harambees to reach out to their constituents, settle political scores, or demonstrate their financial might. But, unlike other harambee events, this function did not have any politicians. Still, the family was able to raise the required amount by the grace of God. This was a miracle!

"Something else...," paused Emmanuel's father to recollect a string of thought, "Emmanuel is a blessed man, and I am often amazed by how God reveals Himself through him. For instance, when we began to prepare for the journey to India, Emmanuel presented his case to Kenya Airways' management, and they gave the family a good bargain. The fee for one air ticket was completely waived while the father and the mother got some good discount on their air tickets, too," Emmanuel's father concluded with a smile.

## **The Church Supported us**

According to Emmanuel's father, the community around them has played a very significant role in their lives. He singles out the Holy Family Mugumo Catholic Church in Mugumo, Kiambu, and the brethren of the Catholic Church from the neighbouring parishes. The community never gets tired of Emmanuel or his family and play a great role in offsetting the bills, some of which would have been impossible for the family.

Beyond supporting the family financially, the community supported the family spiritually and psychologically. They constantly came by and prayed with them, and offered immense psychosocial support. But one thing people must understand is that chronic kidney failure is a situation that drags on and on in the lifetime of an individual. "Of course, some people get tired at some point and understandably so. Our church has been the most supportive to us. By the grace of God, every time we invite them to help us, they come," observed Emmanuel.

## Chapter 2

### First Kidney Transplant

*"Not everyone will understand your journey. That's okay. You're here to live your life, not to make everyone understand." — Hakan Massoud Nawabi*

The journey to India was a very uncertain journey for all the members of the family. A lot went through everyone's minds. There was fear of the unknown. "We didn't know what to expect when we got there," observes Emmanuel's mother.

As Mumo puts it, "Everyone had his or her own fears and anxieties. Emmanuel would perhaps explore many possibilities, including death. Though Emmanuel didn't ever want to discuss this part with me, you could tell it was a real issue he was constantly mulling over in his mind... well, understandably so; but he always reminded us that it was better if we left everything to God."

The family did not know anyone in India. Theirs was a journey of faith. They held mass at their home, prayed for the journey and held on to the belief that God was with them. "It is the prayers that gave us the strength and courage to face the uncertainties of the day... prayers and the kind words from our friends and fellow worshipers strengthened us. I frequently whispered a prayer to God and I am sure God was with us," said Mumo as he recalled the events before Emmanuel's travel to India.

As the family gathered at the airport to see off the triad – Emmanuel, dad and mum – a cloud of anxiety seemed to hover over all of them. Emmanuel's mother didn't say much; she was lost in her own thoughts as they waited for the plane. She recalls:

"As the plane's engine whizzed in the background, I reflected back and I remembered the difficult moments that Emmanuel had to go through as he attended the dialysis sessions twice or thrice every week. Often, my eldest son, Mumo, had to accompany him in the wee hours of the morning to beat the long queues of people waiting for the same

services at Kenyatta National Hospital. Even then, there was no guarantee that he would get to the dialysis machine that day. There were few machines and sometimes Emmanuel had to wait the whole day to get a dialysis machine. Thoughts of the countless times that Emmanuel came back home sick and worn out after dialysis, came flashing into my mind. I remembered the many days I found Emmanuel's sisters crying helplessly beside Emmanuel as he nursed post-dialysis side-effects. Emmanuel would suffer from severe headaches and joint aches that no pain reliever would help. As all these thoughts flashed in my mind like



*Emmanuel (second from left), his sister Eunice (extreme right), and friends, in India – in 2007*

one long continuous movie, my resolve to help him get well, got stronger; I had decided to donate my kidney to Emmanuel, to end his suffering," observed Emmanuel's mother retrospectively.

## On the Cusp of Death at Kenyatta Hospital

*"I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."*

— Mark Twain

As Emmanuel's mother recalled how they prepared for their first journey to India, she highlighted an interesting account on how Emmanuel literally walked the narrow edges of the valley of death. "One day, Emmanuel got very sick and he was rushed to Kenyatta Hospital in critical condition. As the doctors frantically worked around the clock to save his life, two gentlemen who were friends to his father heard about it and rushed to the hospital to check on him. On arrival, the two gentlemen looked at Emmanuel and after sometime, they both concluded that the boy was actually dying.

They called a priest who was also a friend to Emmanuel's father and told him about Emmanuel's condition and the possibility of death. The priest quickly contacted the resident priest at Kenyatta National Hospital, and directed him to make the last prayers for the dying boy. The priest at Kenyatta was just about to start a baptismal ritual in another ward. He left the ritual that was all prepared and about to start and rushed to Emmanuel's room. He quietly and carefully assessed the boy's condition and decided that he must perform the final anointing on the boy as it was apparent that he might not make it through the day. But something, strange happened: After the prayers and the "anointing with oil," a ritual done on the sick often in critical condition (or even in danger of death), Emmanuel suddenly woke up and opened his eyes.

He looked around trying to comprehend what was going on. Emmanuel's father recalled the moment too. "This was a very trying moment for everyone in the family. As the father and head of the family these were excruciating moments that were both physically and psychologically draining. It was scary, really scary. However, we thank God that our boy came round."

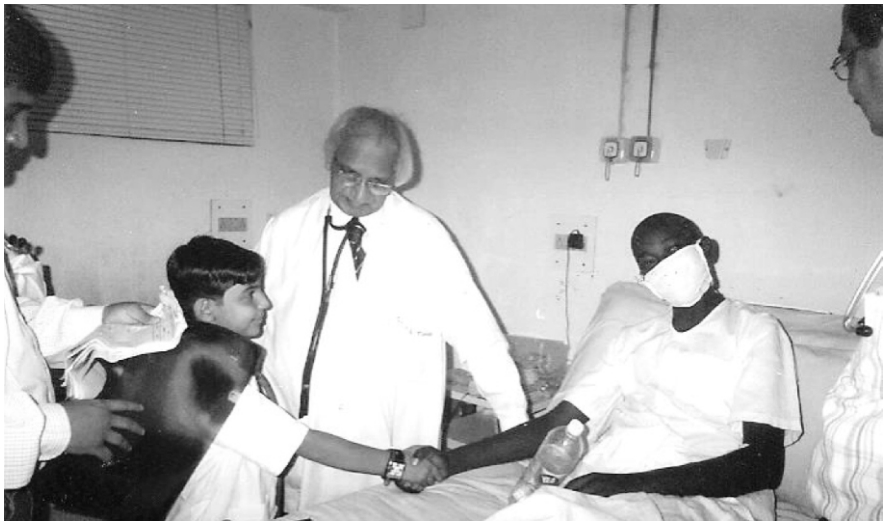
Everyone was optimistic that the journey to India for the kidney transplant was about to change all that. "I couldn't help to imagine that such horrifying incidents would be cast in the past in a matter of hours. All this would soon be behind us. Brighter days were truly ahead for Emmanuel," the boy's father said. Life would definitely change for Emmanuel and the family, and for the better... or so everyone thought.

## Journey to India

*"If I could give my son my kidney, and give him life and both of us live; that was life shared. But even if I die and he lives, I will die a happy man. For him I am always ready for anything."*

**—Emmanuel's Father.**

Emmanuel had made many journeys in his life. But, as he put it, you can never be prepared enough for the kind of the journey he was about to make. This was a journey that he had waited for a long time; a journey that he was optimistic about; a journey that would change his life for the better. It was going to be a historical journey for him... the journey of a lifetime!



*Prof. H L. Trivedi, the owner Institute of Kidney Disease and Research Institute (IKDRI) in India visiting the kidney patients with family members*

"Emmanuel had not travelled by air before. Therefore, I knew it was going to be a more unique journey for him than it would be for me or my wife," said Emmanuel's dad. "I had previously made shorter air travels. For instance, I had travelled with my wife once to Israel. But, anyway, when I look back, the journey to India was not comparable to any of the previous travels that I had made," observed Emmanuel's dad.

It took six hours from Nairobi to Bombay. From there, they took another one-hour flight to Ahmedabad in Gujarat state. As soon as they arrived at the Institute of Kidney Diseases and Research Centre, Emmanuel went through another session of dialysis. The doctors at this hospital had been sufficiently informed of his condition, and so they were very ready for him. They did not waste time after admitting him. They immediately began the numerous medical tests required. They also did the necessary tests on Emmanuel's mother, the prospective donor, to ensure that everything was fine.

Emmanuel's mother recalls this moment vividly: "When we left Kenya, I had left with a new hope: A hope that my son would return to Kenya healed and enjoy his life like other young people. For my son's health and happiness, I was willing to give him my kidney. The love of a mother stops at nothing. I had no second thought about it. All I wanted was to see Emmanuel happy and full of life again."

After numerous tests, they unfortunately got the first setback. Emmanuel's mother was disqualified as a donor. "The doctors said that one of my kidneys was smaller than the other, whatever that meant. So, they could not allow me to donate the kidney to my son. I was so disappointed," said Emmanuel's mother.

The rejection of Emmanuel's mother as a donor threw the triad into some kind of confusion; they had to change plans. As Emmanuel's father observed, "There were only two people accompanying Emmanuel – his mother and I. Therefore, there was no time to think about who would be the next prospective donor. I immediately made up my mind to take up that position. As soon as the doctors received our decision, the tests commenced. After numerous tests, I got a clean bill of health."

"Sometimes people wonder about the experience of kidney donors – what goes on through their mind as they make that critical decision. I guess a lot goes on in their minds as well, but I didn't have much of a choice or time to ponder about many other things. As a father, my son's health and happiness was something I had been anticipating. Anything that could restore his joy was what I desired. This is how I looked at the whole situation. By the way, very many people are dying because of kidney complications. Several died in the wards as I watched. I did not want my son to die that way. No, my heart would not be at peace any more. Every time I looked at Emmanuel, all I could see was a long life ahead of him. I was 55 and felt I had lived most of my life and he deserved a chance to explore his life, too," recounted Emmanuel's father.

The doctors had given an assurance that very rarely would anyone lose his or her life because of donating a kidney. But for Emmanuel's father, that didn't matter much. "If I would give my son my kidney and both of us live, that would be life shared. But, even if I died and he lived, I would have died a happy man. For him, I am always ready for anything," noted Emmanuel's dad thoughtfully.

This is an amazing expression of a father's love for his son. It reminisces Anurag Prakash Ray's words: *"There's no love greater than mothers love, and there's no greater sacrifice than what a father does for his kids."* This incredible act of love is a complete contrast of the grim news from our news media, of fathers hacking their children to death, raping them, or abusing them.

Nothing scares people stiff like the mention of a theatre operation room, and particularly when you know you are next on line. But sometimes things happen so fast that our systems get no time to react as would perhaps be expected. Similarly, things ran a little too fast for Emmanuel's father. However, he had a few moments to throw glances at his wife, then at his son, as if to read their thoughts. Both of them were silent. The atmosphere was tense and one could tell it was one of those moments when silence talked more and people understood more without uttering a word.

For some time, Emmanuel's mother said very little. "She must have been going through a horrendous moment. Having a husband and a son wheeled away into the theatre at the same time as you watch is indeed torturous... extremely torturous," Emmanuel's dad recalled.

Emmanuel's father looked at her in the face in a reassuring way, like one saying, "Everything is going to be fine, my dear." They had not talked much that day. She was sad and a bit preoccupied, but their faith in God kept them strong. "We had to trust in God that everything would be okay. Indeed, it was a very trying moment, I must admit," added Emmanuel's mum.

Emmanuel's dad got into the theatre first. As he lay on the operation bed, a torrent of thoughts wheeled through his mind; but there was little time to really make sense of them. He had decided to make this sacrifice for his son's wellbeing. That was all that mattered then.

Soon the lead doctor came, a friendly old man. He engaged him in some discussion and, by and by, Emmanuel's father drifted away as the anaesthetic dose took effect.

Emmanuel's mother was left outside the theatre alone. She was deep in thought and afraid. All manner of questions flashed through her mind at the time. "Will they come out of this alive? How will life be after these operations? Will both of them be fine after this operation? I couldn't eat. Sometimes in life we find ourselves in very difficult situations that make it hard to pray. I couldn't bring my mind together and pray. I literally sat there, blank, and waited for them," recalled Emmanuel's mum.

"As the long hours trudged on, our God sent His comforter and I got some words to whisper to God. I cannot recall what I said to Him, but I can remember I was constantly saying something to my God. Sometimes, you just have to let go and let God take control.

"I could hardly stop this trail of thought inside my head: Emmanuel's dad, there in front of me, bedridden because of his love for his son? This was a deep lesson for me – that even at that moment, God,



the creator of the earth and the heavens, loves us more than our deepest fears. So, when I remember that moment, I always encourage Emmanuel that God still loves him and his family. When it shall please Him to have his kidneys function again, they will not delay even for a second without functioning. I still believe in that, and I believe that our God is able to do more than we can ever imagine."

"It is God who assures us: 'Pray and you shall get, knock and the door shall be opened for you.' Isn't this the same God? Would He say this and not accomplish it? He is God and He is not a liar. What is in His will shall come to be," remarked Emmanuel's mother.

Emmanuel's father woke up hours later with a faint recollection of the day's events. His wife was waiting by his side. She had barely left the waiting bay during the operation session. She looked at him and all she saw was this unfathomable love of a parent – a parent who was ever willing to give all to have his son live to see another day.

Emmanuel's father was eager to see his son. He observed: "I cannot tell how long I was unconscious. But when I came round, I saw myself on a hospital bed. A few seconds later, the memories came back and I recalled what was going on. One side of my abdomen was wrapped in a heap of bandages. I felt no pain, only numbness. A couple of minutes later, I was wheeled into the recovery room where I spent the night."

The doctors were very friendly and attentive to their patient. He could wait no more. He wanted to see Emmanuel. His request was finally granted. He was gently wheeled to the ICU to see his son.

"The doctors had completed the transplant and Emmanuel was awake. I was overwhelmed. He looked fine and I thanked God for the success of the transplant. Deep in my mind, I believed that was the end of the long struggle with this disease. I believed that was the final journey the family had to make. I yearned to see my son happy once more."

## Chapter 3

### Emmanuel's First Kidney Fails

*Transformation is a process, and as life happens there are tons of ups and downs. It's a journey of discovery - there are moments on mountaintops and moments in deep valleys of despair.*

**—Rick Warren**

The following day was a very cold day. Emmanuel's mother went to visit her son. But what she saw that day remains deeply engrafted in her mind: "I will never forget what I saw that day. A group of doctors were surrounding Emmanuel and they looked frantic. My heart skipped a beat. My son was pale and shivered like a leaf. All was not well. I couldn't comprehend what was going on. After sometime, one of the doctors informed me that the boy had a "high grade fever." His whole body shivered so much that the bed shook. This was very scary for me. I really cried. I went close and looked at him and when he saw me, he called out feebly: 'Mum, mum, if God really wants me to die, let me go. Let me go mum.'" These words, coming from my son, were heart-wrenching, I cried a lot that day. I began asking God questions: Why was all this happening to our son? Where have we gone wrong? Why was this happening to us, even after so many prayers for Emmanuel? Why was this happening to us? Why aren't our prayers reaching God?"

"The minutes dragged on lazily as the boy's body continued to shiver wildly. He was becoming pale minute after minute. He was in great pain and his parents did not know what to do or say to him. Fear was all over their faces. After sometime, Emmanuel's temperature began to rise tremendously. After a short, while his temperature was dangerously high. "I touched his face, and my instinct told me something had to be done. Everyone, including me, got frantic around the hospital, either looking for ice or applying it on Emmanuel's body. The ice would melt almost immediately upon getting into contact with his body," recalls Emmanuel's mother.

"This was indeed one of the most dispiriting moments of our lives. As the team of doctors worked on him, the senior doctor came over

to us with some news that we least expected. "The new kidney graft failed." Everyone was silent – maybe surprised, or confused. As the doctor continued to give further explanation, he sounded like someone talking behind a thick wall of glass. No one can recall anything else he said. The news was very depressing, to say the least, for Emmanuel's parents.

Emmanuel's father recalls the moment: "As the doctor dropped the bombshell, I couldn't help but wonder; why did it have to be like this? Why did I have to go through the surgery and give away the kidney only for it to fail so soon? If I had to make a choice between having me die or have the kidney work for my son, I would have selflessly faced my death for this boy. But what can we say?" he concluded softly as he gazed in the open space, away from me, in deep thought. "God's plans are never easy to comprehend. The fact that we cannot comprehend them at some point in our lives does not make them wrong. He is a sovereign and a good God. I didn't want to question God's wisdom as a Christian, despite the scores of questions that whirled through my mind."

After some brief moments of silence, Emmanuel's father proceeded: "I told God that we had done our part. His words reminded me that everyone had a role in this world. God knew that, one day, I would donate my kidney to my son and... it wouldn't last even a day in his body. I am certain that in his own wisdom, our loving God understands why. I believe that God has a good plan for all of us. I looked at my distraught wife and whispered to her, "We have done our best. If it is God's will to have Emmanuel live, may His will be done."

The look on the face of Emmanuel's father narrated the rest of the story. It was a story of pain and agony, the kind of pain that only people who had gone through such trying moments would understand. If it was so hard for his parents, what was Emmanuel going through? The next section explores some of the difficult moments of an emotionally-ravaged Emmanuel on the recovery bed in a far-off country, devastated both physically and psychologically yet holding on to his faith in God.

## My Dad's Kidney

*"God knew that, one day, I would donate my kidney to my son and it wouldn't last a day in his body. I am certain that in His own wisdom, our loving God understands why. I believe that God has a good plan for all of us."*

**—Emmanuel's Father.**

As Emmanuel lay on that bed in pain, watching his mother and his father weighed down by the sad news from the doctors, a lot went through his mind. "I recalled the words of a doctor from Kenyatta Hospital, *'Kidney transplant is the only option out of your predicaments.'* This statement gave me a lot of hope that time. It gave me a lot of courage. It inspired me greatly. So when I lay on the surgery table to receive my dad's kidney, my hope for a new life, a new beginning, had hit the roof.

"At that moment, as I waited for the life-changing operation, my mind moved from moment to moment in my life. I recalled the many days I had to struggle through public transport to make it to Kenyatta National Hospital for dialysis. I remembered the long queues in the hospital as I waited for my turn. I remembered the many hours I had to spend and watch a machine drain off my blood and cleanse it. I recalled the difficult moments when I couldn't afford money for dialysis. The memories of these difficult moments played out in my mind like one endless movie. But all those struggles were about to come to an end. I thanked God that this was about to come to an end.

"It was in October 2004, when the family finally decided that I had to go for a kidney transplant. It looked like a far-fetched dream at first, mainly because of the cost of a transplant. Raising Ksh1.5 million (\$15,000) for this transplant seemed to me like a lofty heap of the imagination. But no situation can match God's divine providence and benevolence, neither will hopelessness ever overwhelm his grace and mercy.

"On the operation bed, I recalled how my family and friends – touched by God's love – intervened. By God's grace and mercy, we raised exactly the Ksh1.5 million that was required for the transplant.

This was a miracle that will never be erased from our minds. Surely, God makes a way where there seems to be no way. My mind drifted along the long journey of faith that I had made. I recalled a friend called Carol Kamitha, who introduced me and my family to the manager of Kenya Airways sales department, Ms Mary Kiama. I will never forget the generosity of this lady. She organized for my flight to India and further highlighted my plight to her boss then, Mr. Titus Naikuni. We got a very good deal on our travel tickets to India. I had no idea of what was in store for me, but I had faith and courage that comes from God that I would face it all.



*Emmanuel during a dialysis session at Lions Hospital in Loresho, Nairobi, Kenya.*

I do not know exactly how long the transplant operation took, but it must have been hours. Finally, it was over and indeed successful. Thereafter, I was wheeled into the critical care unit for closer observation. After nearly three hours, the doctors detected a high-grade

fever that was a big threat to the new graft. What followed were frantic efforts by the doctors to save my life and the new kidney. The excruciating pain that I went through at that moment cannot be captured in words. They were simply strings of indescribable grievous episodes.

I was in a deep valley of pains. Pangs of pains were like flames of fire all over my body. I struggled and held on to my faith in Christ like Samson struggled with lions in the jungle. I fought back any thought of desperation. I prayed for strength. I held on to this deep conviction that the good Lord was with me.

The high grade fever was getting the better of me. I shivered like a leaf. I was really scared. I knew that my parents were there with me, but I could hardly see them. They were saying something, but I could hardly hear what they were whispering to me. They must have told me many good things. But I was too busy fighting my own battles, battles of survival. I endured a lot of pain. After so much of a spirited fight, one of the veins at the graft had ruptured, spelling doom to the graft (doctors informed me later). This meant that I had lost the kidney. This was the most heart-breaking news after so much hope and a spirited struggle."

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The defunct kidney was removed on a Sunday. Emmanuel and his parents had little to do after that. All they could do was to watch and pray. They waited for the wounds on Emmanuel's body, as well as on his father's body, to heal. Their minds remained alive to the fact that while the wounds on their body may heal, the deeper wounds in their hearts would take much longer, but they had to hold on and continue trusting in God.

After the extraction of the failed graft, Emmanuel's condition would occasionally get critical. Emmanuel's mother recalls such a moment: "One night, my son's condition worsened. We were all afraid that he might die. I sat by his bed praying for his wellbeing throughout the night. I monitored his pulse every single minute and alerted the nurses every time I suspected that Emmanuel's pulse had changed. I struggled with this terrible and horrifying feeling of losing my son, that

hovered over my head like a sinister cloud. This fear is so real for all parents, especially those whose children are in critical condition in hospital. I have never been so afraid in my life," Emmanuel's mother recalled as she supported her chin with one hand.

## Light at the End of a Dark Tunnel

*"It's true. The storms won't last forever. The nasty weather will never last. There is always that light at the end of the tunnel." — Diana Rose Morcilla*

After staying in the hospital for some days, surprisingly, the doctors asked them if they had another kidney donor in mind who could donate a kidney to Emmanuel. This came not only as a pleasant surprise, but also a glimmer of hope to the triad. At that devastating moment, they were at a loss on what to do or even what to expect. Emmanuel's parents engaged on the matter and agreed that Emmanuel's eldest brother (Mumo) could be a good candidate. The parents discussed with their eldest son about the news and he agreed to donate his kidney to his brother.

Emmanuel and his parents stayed in India for two months to give Emmanuel time to recuperate and get ready for another kidney transplant. Meanwhile, Emmanuel attended his dialysis sessions at the hospital.

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Back at home in Kenya, the family and friends organized a mini fundraiser to enable Mumo, Emmanuel's brother, to go to India and donate a kidney to his brother. Emmanuel's father contacted many of the family friends and former workmates in Kenya and asked them to chip in, and they gladly assisted. "Indeed, God touched my friends and family members and enough money was raised; soon, Mumo joined us in India," recalled Emmanuel's dad.

## Chapter 4

### Second Kidney Transplant

*Love is sacrifice. "Sacrifice, which is the passion of great souls, has never been the law of societies."*

**—Henri Frederic Amiel**

Mumo, Emmanuel's eldest brother, had a fair share of a tale to tell about Emmanuel's condition. He loves his brother so much that he has always been very close to him. He would do anything to help his brother. He lives the true legacy of a brother's keeper.

"I have been close to my brother Emmanuel from his childhood and I hate to see him in pain," says the soft-spoken gentleman. Mumo is a committed Christian who has dedicated his life to God. At the point of this interview, Mumo was finalizing his eight years of studies in Nyeri for the Catholic priesthood.

The news of Emmanuel's failing kidneys hit him like a thunderbolt. He recounts the eventful day when he received the news: "I was seriously shocked, to say the least. The news disturbed me for days. I didn't understand much about kidney illnesses, neither had I interacted with a kidney patient before. When I accompanied Emmanuel for his first dialysis session, I realized that the situation was getting pretty serious.

A lot went through my mind. I did not like the whole procedure. It was an unpleasant sight. But I knew that I had to be strong for him as a big brother. That is what our parents have taught us: To be constantly a source of encouragement to our siblings.

During his initial sessions of dialysis, Emmanuel would complain of fatigue or discomfort. Yes, it was understandable – dialysis takes about four hours per session. For four hours you can't do anything else. Your independence is taken away from you. You become dependent on machines, chemicals and other complicated procedures. You feel like a prisoner, albeit walking among people whom you perceive to be free.



As a young adult, independence is a key component of life. Every teenager craves for liberty. Freedom from restrictions. But for Emmanuel, restrictions were being instituted in various aspects of his young life. As a teenager, I am sure these restrictions were having a toll on him psychologically. That would not be considered strange either, that is how most of us behaved when we were at that age.

Emmanuel disliked the fact that his life was becoming more and more dependent on his family members. He hated the fact that someone had to drop him to hospital or stay with him throughout the dialysis process. He disliked the fact that his condition was draining the family resources fast. Sometimes, I think, he felt helpless about it.

Therefore, I did my best to understand him and I had to constantly encourage him and assure him that all would be well because we trusted in God. That's what it means to be a brother.

During his low moments, Emmanuel would feel bad about his condition. It was not easy to understand him or what was going through his mind. But friends are the most important pillars to an individual in times of tribulation. Emmanuel derived a lot encouragement from friends. With time, Emmanuel was able to open up and talk about his condition to his friends. He would discuss his life with nurses and doctors in hospitals and therefore, by and by, he gained a large network of supportive friends.

As the eldest son, I went through my own spells of emotions and anxieties too. It was a difficult moment for me. I knew it was going to be tough. No one could know what was going to happen next. We could not tell what the future held for us at any point in time.

With both our parents out of the country as they accompanied Emmanuel to India, I had to take charge of the home and take care of my younger siblings. I had to learn to make decisions and to make them fast with minimal chance of failure. I had to be there for my younger brothers and sisters. I took it by stride, one day at a time and God came through for us.

After the departure of my parents and Emmanuel for India, I felt the huge gap in front of me almost immediately. The first thing that I did was to call my siblings for a meeting and make them understand what was going on. I urged them to be strong and explained to them that no matter what happened, life must go on. The first few days my siblings were quite disturbed. One of them cried a lot. I kept on talking to her and after a few days she was on her feet, either because she had accepted the situation or had just decided to live with it.

When the news came through that Emmanuel could receive another kidney after the first one failed, I felt relieved. But I did not expect that the next donor would be me. Surprisingly, when my dad called and asked me if I could be the next donor, I decided to take it on. I think my mind had become numb from the recent happenings in the family.

I could hardly guess how my siblings would react upon receiving the news. But I had to break the news to them. Eunice, my eldest sister, was the most affected. I did my best to encourage her and reassured her that we had God on our side. After sometime of reflection, she cooled down. It was tough for my other siblings too, to watch me leave.

Finally, the day of my journey to India came. A lot went through my mind throughout my flight to India, but I was determined to do what I could for Emmanuel. The journey was smooth and didn't have any odd incident.

When I got there, Emmanuel was suffering from a fever. One look at him made me sad. I was sad not only because he had the fever, but also because the situation that had brought him to India remained largely unchanged. We talked a lot of things with him, but I think what had taken a huge toll on him was the loss of the first kidney. He was really disturbed by the turn of events. He was pretty unhappy. I did my best to reassure him that he had to keep hope and faith alive."

But what does Mumo think about donating a kidney? For him, donating a kidney was a noble thing. It was like sharing life with someone. He says: "It is like you are breathing life into a person. It's a sacrifice that is worth it. It is done out of love. Therefore, it should be seen as normal for one to get emotionally attached to the person they are giving a kidney to.

There are a lot of mysteries associated with donating a kidney, and obscure tales that cause fear. As a person who has donated one of my kidneys, I can assure you that there is nothing to fear about donating a kidney to a needy person. It is normal to have some fear. Potential donors will fear about life after donating the kidney. What are the risks? What will life be after donating a kidney? But sometimes, as Winston Churchill put it in 1940, *'There is actually nothing to fear but fear itself.'* I am a living testimony that you can donate your kidney and lead a normal life. It is now 10 years since I donated my kidney to Emmanuel, back in 2006. I still lead a normal life like anyone else. Nothing has changed.

Finally, the moment to give my brother a kidney came. As I was being wheeled into the theatre, all that preoccupied my mind was getting my brother out of his predicament. For me, if by donating my kidney I would lift Emmanuel from this valley of woes and pain, I was more than ready to do so. Whatever, the outcome would be, I didn't give that much of a thought. I left that to God because he is the author of life."

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Moments later, Mumo came round, optimistic that his act of kindness would change Emmanuel's life for the better. "I cannot tell how long I was unconscious in the operation room, but when I finally came round, I felt tired and fatigued. My head felt heavy, my limbs were numb, only my brain seemed to work. Many thoughts crossed my mind as I tried to recollect the string of events that led me to the present state. When I finally got the full string of events that got me to that operation room, I looked at one of the nurses and my first question was how Emmanuel was doing. The beautiful nurse, who had been waiting by my bed, politely informed me that the process was pretty successful and Emmanuel was doing fine too. My heart was filled with peace and all the anxiety withered away. Finally, I was able to help my brother Emmanuel. Finally, my brother would be well. I went back to sleep."

## **Mumo's Visa Expires**

Mumo's travel to India was not without its own challenges, as Emmanuel's father explains: "After donating the kidney, we had a small issue. Mumo's visa was expiring within a week. Applying for another visa would have meant that he had to go to New Delhi, hundreds of kilometres from the hospital. This would have been a risky and complicated journey for him. So, after four days we had to release Mumo to go back to Kenya. The wounds were not healed but we had no option.

We consulted the doctors and they assured us that it would be okay for him to travel. It was a very difficult moment for me looking at my son, Mumo, walk away with a load of bandages on his abdomen and the other son on the bed still recuperating. 'Isn't this too much for one person?' I thought. But, then, I had to be strong. 'God had all the answers,' I told myself."

## **The Church in India**

Emmanuel's family stay in India was not without some memorable times. Emmanuel's father recounts: "One day a young man from Kenya visited us in the hospital. He was like an angel sent from heaven. He was a great source of inspiration. He was a student there. He once picked Emmanuel and they visited the local Catholic church. The priest was very impressed and challenged by Emmanuel's story. He promised to visit Emmanuel, and kept his promise. Praying together in this foreign land where Christians were a minority was a great blessing.

One day, one of the nurses found us right in the middle of our morning prayers. She looked shocked and ran out to tell her colleague. We thought for a moment that we were in trouble. However, the nurses came back to us later in the day and were very excited. They informed us that they were also Catholics and were happy to meet us. The confession by these ladies reminded me of that time when Elijah thought that he was all alone in the wilderness and God told him: 'I have reserved 7,000 in Israel who have not bowed before Baal and their mouths have not kissed him' (1 Kings 19:18).

We became great friends and they were very supportive. They later linked us with the priest from the nearest Catholic church. A few days later the priest came visiting in civilian clothes. He informed us that he couldn't celebrate the mass in the ward as it was prohibited by law. We then requested that he administers the sacrament of the sick to us, which he surprisingly accepted. We closed the door and he put on his robes and administered the sacrament.

The following Sunday we visited his parish and celebrated the Mass in the Gujarat language."

## **New Kidney Works**

Did Mumo's kidney work? Emmanuel had an interesting account of the events after the transplant.

"The day Mumo donated his kidney to me marked one of the happiest moments of my life and that of my family members. Though Mumo returned to Kenya after just four days, the kidney worked well and everybody was incredibly excited about the turn of events. However, the graft had its own episodes that I must let you know." He continued. "Six hours after the operation, while in ICU, the doctors were called in for an emergency. I had high-grade fever again. This was very scary for me and my parents, bearing in mind what had happened before when I lost my father's kidney.

Though the doctors were very cautious, they were least prepared for what was to happen later. After sometime, the doctors noticed with utter consternation that the second kidney was also failing. In the midst of the bouts of fever the doctors noticed something else strange: I had some deep vein clots that spelt doom for the graft, besides being potentially fatal. Soon, the lead doctor was called in, and a decision was reached. They prepared to carry out a procedure called biopsy, which included removing a piece of tissue from the donated kidney using a biopsy gun. The biopsy procedure was excruciating despite the fact that they had anaesthetized the area being worked on.

The delicate process took several hours, during which I had to lie in the same position without moving. At first I thought they were to carry out the procedure only once, but to my dismay, many more were to follow. It went on like this for days and I had seven operations in total to remove the clots. I got used to some the medical jargon, including "nil by mouth," which meant I was not expected to eat or drink anything before going to the theatre.

These procedures really wasted off my body, but I had no option. I trusted the professionals and above all I had total trust in God that all would be well. I had nothing much to do but pray as I was bedridden and almost developed bed sores.

As the doctors continued observing me, they noted some more complications that were a threat to the graft. To save the graft, they had to do a highly complicated and expensive process called 'plasmapheresis.' During this process, blood plasma is separated from whole blood and the rest is returned to the donor. I was connected to a machine that resembles the dialyzer. According to the medics, I was administered 'human serum albumin' (a version of serum albumin found in humans) to sustain the equilibrium of the body system. I was later informed that process costs about Rs53,000 (\$797) per session. I underwent 11 such sessions.

This was simply not tenable for our family. I knew we were headed for the worst part of our stay in India. I had to do something before the bill surfaced.

One day, I walked out and limped my way into the hospital owner's office. He was a compassionate man who took his time to listen to people. He was moved by my account and decided to give us discounted services. Indeed, I will never forget the kindness of this gentleman. We received a 10 per cent concession on most of the services and many of them were given to us for free. Most significantly, he sliced off the cost of plasmapheresis and we paid only 10 per cent of the total cost.

Due to the prolonged stay in the hospital, I was also known to many of the staff members. Many of them sincerely empathised with my

condition. Every day of my life came to pass as the Lord our God promised: "My grace is sufficient for you..." (2 Cor. 12:9). Ever since, I have learnt to take all situations positively, since nothing happens without God's knowledge.

Additionally, I have noted that there is something to be learned from every experience we go through. The worst thing one can do is to recede in fear. Keep off fear! Fear triggers all sorts of negativity. Fear is the devil's instrument of frustrating the believers in Christ. Fear and negative orientation in life result in depression and may even lead to suicide.

God has been gracious to me and I have been able to fight fear through prayers. He has planted a desire to pray and worship him in my heart. I always praise Him for giving me prayerful parents, too."

## **Back to Kenya with a New Kidney**

Eventually, all went well. The graft was resuscitated and it worked again, and I was discharged.

So finally, it seemed like Emmanuel's troubles were over. By the end of July that year, Emmanuel had recuperated well and the doctors were willing to let the triad leave the hospital. The day for their departure was finally set. However, the day they were to leave, heavy rains pounded the city, flooding Bombay Airport. All flights were cancelled.

Emmanuel describes to me the string of events that followed: "We were very anxious to leave. We had exhausted all our resources. We had run out of funds. We were running into debt. The debt had accumulated to almost Ksh500,000 by then. Sometimes we didn't have money for food, but I would talk to the few friends we had made and God worked through them in a big way. Our friends like the late Bishop Johnson Akio, a bishop from Sudan who had come for medical attention, really encouraged and supported us. He would visit us every day. We had Holy Mass often with him and it kept our faith alive.

After 10 months in India, it was time to go back home. With a new kidney in me, I was full of life and hope. Nothing made me happier than the fact that I was getting back home alive. I fervently whispered numerous thanksgiving prayers to my Creator on my way back home. Our experiences in India were fearsome. Very many patients had gone back home in coffins but here I was, alive and walking.

I was overjoyed to see my mother country – the land where I was brought up. I was grateful to God for allowing me to breathe the fresh air of our country. Family and friends were present and turned up in large numbers to welcome me back. Many cried when they saw me. It was a while since I left for India. Many had given up on me. Some cried and sympathised with me because I looked so frail. I had lost a significant amount of weight. I felt like I didn't represent the person they hoped to see; for me, however, greeting my friends and relatives was like one long dream I was waking up to.

I thanked the Almighty God for making the graft work. I could go for a short call of nature again. However, I frequently visited the Kenyatta National Hospital renal section for numerous tests as prescribed by the nephrologists (kidney doctors) in India. I had to endure these tests. I was determined more than ever before to lead a normal life once again.

My body functions had picked up well; I was free from pain. My life was simply back to what I once knew. I knew the doctors had said they could not guarantee the long-time survival of the new kidney in me, but that didn't matter to me. What mattered then was that I was well and I was back home.

After settling down, I was determined to pick up the pieces of my life, hopes and aspirations; I had to breathe some life into them. First, I needed to finish up my catering course. A friend helped me to get back into college and that is how I managed to complete my catering course. Sadly, I could not attend my graduation, as I had to travel back to India for some specialized treatment to pre-empt some complications that threatened to kill my new kidney."



## Chapter 5

### My Brother's Kidney is Gone

*We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.*

**—Author Unknown**

During the seven months that Emmanuel lived with the new kidney donated by his brother Mumo, his life changed drastically for the better. He could do almost all things by himself. He did not have to depend on others to survive.

But, as days went by, Emmanuel began to experience constant pains and found himself visiting the renal section at KNH more frequently. After several visits, a decision was finally reached that he had to go back to India for further checks. This declaration was made at a time when the family was at its lowest, financially. After some deliberations, the family decided that Emmanuel had to travel alone to India.

### Lone Journey to India

"It was one of those days I hate to remember in 2006," Emmanuel recalls. "The doctors had finally reached a verdict – I had to go back to India for check up on my second graft. My whole body was literally burning with pain. I could hardly walk. I had to be supported most of the time. I couldn't bathe myself; my sister had to bathe me. Such episodes of life made me feel greatly tormented.

"As I walked to the airport's boarding section, I used an umbrella to support myself. I was already late for the flight and this also scared me. Fortunately, I had communicated with the KQ's sales manager about my condition and the urgency of the treatment.

"When I got to the counter, I could barely stand. The lady at the counter informed me that everyone had boarded the plane but me. But the plane could not leave without me. The flight had to be delayed for about 15 minutes to allow me board and travel with the others. The staff

of KQ got me a wheelchair and wheeled me into the plane. I don't know if these KQ attendants ever got to know how helpful that was. The ride on the wheel chair gave me some relief from some back pains that were really killing me.

"When I boarded the plane, all eyes were on me. Everybody wanted to know the person who had caused the delay. I am not sure of what they were expecting. Curiosity was drawn all over their faces. I think they were anticipating a powerful man from the government or some other important person and not a sickly fellow on a wheelchair full of pimples on his face, a reaction caused by some medicine prescribed earlier.

"Despite being on a free ticket, I was treated like a VIP throughout the flight. I was assigned one hostess to attend to my needs throughout the long journey. Surely, goodness and mercy followed me literally as proclaimed by God.

"On arrival, I was picked by a rickshaw, what we call 'tuktuk' in Kenya (a three-wheeled automobile), for my journey to the hospital. Despite the incessant pain on virtually every part of my body, what I experienced in India was a miracle in itself. On arrival at the hospital, the doctor gave me an injection that relieved me of the pain and I slept like a new born baby. Then the doctors worked hard to sustain the graft and somehow the graft came alive again. I was given medications and was under close observation for about two months. In total, I stayed in India for four months as the doctors tried all known techniques to keep the graft alive."

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"During my stay in India, something interesting happened. The country was experiencing a crisis caused by an infectious disease they called '*chikungunya*' or Chicken Guinea. Chikungunya is a rare form of viral infection caused by an alpha virus that is spread by mosquitoes. The virus is highly infective and disabling. This disease had instilled great fear in the people of this community, the kind of fear that could only be compared to the dread of the killer Ebola disease that ravaged a number of countries in West Africa.

"Chikungunya infection can cause a debilitating illness characterized by high fever, which can reach up to 40°C. Sudden onset of flu-like symptoms including severe headache, chills, rash, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain and joint pain are common. The illness could lead to jaundice and eventually death.

"Incidentally, I had been struggling with some fierce fever at that time for a number of days. Being a foreigner from East Africa where the disease is believed to have originated, one can only imagine what was going on in the minds of this horrified community. I was a suspect carrier of this feared disease in India.

"I was immediately isolated and observed more keenly. Numerous tests were also carried to ascertain the nature of my illness. Visitors were restricted from my room. Only a few nurses came to attend to me and when they did so, they looked like astronauts: Adorned in full combat gear for infectious diseases.

"I stayed in that isolation ward for about two days. I could hardly eat. Most of my Kenyan friends kept away, too. I realized that people indeed fear death. The rumour was rife that I had contracted the dreaded flu and that people should not get close. The sight of doctors visiting my room wearing masks and heavy gloves bothered me a lot, but it confirmed their fears. I felt like a dangerous specimen among fearful beings.

"But one day, a lady from Kiambu, Mrs Hellen Mwaura – popularly known as Mwandus – got totally distraught by the way I was being treated (she had accompanied her husband to the hospital). The husband was a former mayor of Kiambu Town Council, as it was known then). I was not being fed or cleaned. She decided that enough was enough. She couldn't watch me suffer in isolation any longer. She came over, bathed me, and prepared some food for me. I was really encouraged and physically rejuvenated. She was so kind, she kept on visiting me every day.

"For the first time, I experienced what the patients who are often condemned to an isolation ward felt. It is a pretty awful feeling. You spend the whole day by yourself. You feel like a poisonous fowl amid the

healthy ones. You have no one by your side but God. The devil will occasionally sneak in to discourage you; the devil will always be there to make you feel like everything is lost and nothing but death awaits you.

"I used to pray a lot and that is why I see my stay in India as a moment of reflection for me. There were many lonely nights and days, but Jesus kept me company. I would hardly sleep unless I received a job that would send me to slumber.

"My body has gone through a lot of medical procedures. Indeed, it has gone through more medical procedures than I can remember. Since this hospital doubled as a research institute, many of the doctors there were interested in my illness, too. I think I presented a rich opportunity for them to learn so many things about renal failure. They took me through very expensive processes, for instance plasmapheresis – a process in which the liquid in the blood, or plasma, is separated from the cells. In sick people, plasma can contain antibodies that attack the immune system. A machine removes the affected plasma and replaces it with good plasma, or a plasma substitute."

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"Let me digress a bit and give you a preview of what my life in India looked like at that time. As far as I was concerned, I lived in the favour of God throughout my stay there. I received many special treatments in a foreign land. I will never forget five great Indian friends who I got to know during my stay there. I always think of these five Indian friends as God-sent. They introduced me to an Indian Catholic church and constantly came through for us during our lowest moments in India. Sometimes, we ran out of resources, but our Indian friends were always there to support us. Truly, God knows His plan for us – one with a future and hope, for we experienced this and more.

"Sometimes, an Indian Catholic bishop came to visit me. As Catholics, we believe that when a bishop visits a person, he brings blessings with him. For sure, he came accompanied by more people and I got more friends. We used to partake the Holy Communion as often as possible with him. Later, he sent nuns to come and visit me at the

hospital. I saw God's mercy and favour shine on me throughout my stay in India.



*Emmanuel with missionary sisters of charity (founded by Mother Teresa) in India. They provided meals for Emmanuel's family during their stay in India*

"Listening to the bishop's homilies in this land was one of the rarest things to come by. They helped me to keep in touch with my Creator. When I look back, I always wonder how I would have made it through all these trials without God's intervention. Think about it this way, a single kidney transplant would cost about \$15,000, excluding the other expenses of living in a foreign land. Yet I found myself staying in India for months. God catered for my needs.

"Living in India made me appreciate so many things we take for granted in Kenya, for instance the serene weather. We should thank God that despite all the challenges we go through as a country, we have fine weather. The weather in India swings from one extreme to the other. At times it is as hot as a furnace – it could get twice as hot as in Kenya. Other times it would be extremely cold."

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## **My Brother's Kidney is Gone!**

"It was one of the most difficult days of my life, both physically and psychologically. Why was I going through all this? I asked myself over and over again.

"I was still in India and the doctors had been working hard to keep the graft alive. However, after a protracted effort by the highly specialized renal experts in the hospital, it became evident that I was going to lose the second kidney. All this was happening amid another prolonged episode of indescribable pain.

"The doctors were also concerned about the outcome of my case. They constantly converged around my bed and engaged in deep conversation," narrated Emmanuel, looking into space.

"I knew the news would be devastating to my family. It would be yet another disappointing moment. We were back to square one. Nothing much had changed. One of the Indian friends opted to tell my family beforehand.



*Doctors discussing Emmanuel's case*

Above all, I knew my brother Mumo would be pretty disappointed by the development. He had sacrificed to have me live as happily as other young adults of my age. But I prayed that God would give him understanding."

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Mumo was disappointed, to say the least. The following conversation captures his reaction following the sad turn of events:

"The news that the graft had failed was indeed devastating. I couldn't understand why it had to happen," he observed sadly. "I was very disturbed but I couldn't do much. It was a stressful moment for the whole family, too, mainly because as a family we were back to where we started. Fortunately, the family was in a strong prayer group, locally called 'Mbutu.' The members of this prayer group constantly encouraged us and this is where we derived our strength from."

## Chapter 6

### Can You Get a Third Donor?

*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*  
—Isaiah 41:10

Despite the devastating turn of events, Emmanuel did not give up. The doctors, too, did not; they sought to know if there was yet a third donor willing to give a kidney to Emmanuel.

One of Emmanuel's cousins, Albert, volunteered. Arrangements were quickly made to have him join Emmanuel in India. Emmanuel's eldest sister had travelled earlier to help Emmanuel. Finally, Albert joined the duo in India.

The day after his arrival, a string of tests was done on him to ascertain if he was indeed compatible. All tests were positive and we were all very hopeful. But there was one more test that they call LCM (leukocyte cross match), that was supposed to be the final test.

We all waited for the results of this test patiently but anxiously too. The results were disappointingly negative. All efforts to correct the situation and have positive LCM results proved futile. The young man did not qualify as a kidney donor. That meant that we had to look for a new donor.

Of course, it was very dispiriting for our cousin, and the rest of us as well. We were stuck once again. Money had been spent and the donor failed the medical tests despite assurance by the doctors in Kenya.

Eunice was deeply disturbed by the turn of events. She had joined Emmanuel in India after his lone journey and prolonged stay in the hospital. She had literally gone through all the agonizing moments of losing the second kidney with him. After pondering over the matter for some time, she broke the news to Emmanuel, "I will take my cousin's position and be the donor."



But for some reason, Emmanuel would not take that. He immediately declined the offer and they got into an argument that both of them will never forget.

## My Sister's Kidney

*"Sister. She is your mirror, shining back at you with a world of possibilities. She is your witness, who sees you at your worst and best, and loves you anyway."*  
— **Barbara Alpert**

Eunice, Emmanuel's eldest sister, had a fair share of experiences in India as a kidney donor. In this section, she narrates the amazing experiences she went through while supporting her beloved brother Emmanuel:

"Some people had fed Emmanuel with some negative rumours that if her sister donated her kidney, she would never bear children. Emmanuel loves her sister so much and therefore he flatly declined her offer. 'Eunice, I don't want you to donate your kidney to me! Nii ndirenda uciare, uihurie thii Nie ndikwenda uhe higo' (I want you to get many children and fill the world. I do not want you to donate your kidney to me), he quipped in Gikuyu, his first language, though he rarely spoke it.

Her sister sat next to him crying and reassuring him that that was not true, neither was it scientifically proven. But Emmanuel was adamant. Eunice's pleas and tears only succeeded in working up Emmanuel and pushing his emotional buttons even further. "Nii ndirenda uhe higo" (I do not want you to donate your kidney to me) he said over and over in Gikuyu

The atmosphere was tense and the two siblings could not talk. There were three people in the room: their cousin, who sat on a different bed in the same room, Eunice and Emmanuel. Eunice and Emmanuel had gone through a lot in life and had bonded well from an early age.

Eunice explains: "The two of us have a tight bond as brother and sister. We definitely have our little brother-sister quarrels like in any

other family, but we would reconcile and move on. When Emmanuel is unwell, I get so affected. I have cried a lot over him," explained Eunice reminiscently.

As Eunice wept next to Emmanuel, pleading with him in between her sobs, a message came through her phone. She looked at it and turned to Emmanuel. "Emmanuel, you must read this message! She said aloud. "We give you our blessings," from Dad.

Having dad's blessing meant a lot. In African traditional set-ups, fathers are profoundly honoured. Only people who are not wise would argue with their dads on such pertinent issues. Emmanuel knew better and he softened his stand.

Emmanuel later explained his fears to me:

"You see; I love my sister so much. She has been a great source of hope and inspiration. I could not imagine her losing an opportunity of bearing children because of me. I must admit that it was this fear that troubled me. I never wanted to get her in harm's way. Interestingly, I never felt like my dad or brother faced similar threats. I never at any one time imagined they might not rise from the operation table. I always saw them pulling through. I think it's because I was always inspired by how courageously and soberly they faced issues in life. They always made me feel that what I was going through was but a temporary detour in life and things would soon settle down and life would continue normally.

I had a one-on-one conversation about the "infertility rumour among female donors" and they convinced me that it was just that: rumours. They told me it's only in India that female donors are prohibited before being married because of the resulting scar. For her, the scar was not an issue and it is not an issue in Africa.

## **You Have a Hole in the Heart!**

Finally, Eunice went through the rigorous pre-transplant tests and as they were being done, the doctors noted something very unusual about Eunice's heart – she had a hole in the heart.

"This was startling news for me and my family back at home," observed Eunice as she recounted the events from that moment. "I was very scared. I didn't know about it. But according to the doctors, I could still donate the kidney to my brother. That was at least some good news. I firmly cautioned the doctors from telling Emmanuel about the discovery. I was afraid that the news would possibly devastate him further, or he would perhaps use it as a legitimate reason to decline my offer as a kidney donor. But I love my brother so much and I did not want to see him suffer anymore. I was advised that I should have the heart anomaly rectified after the transplant through a modern process called angioplasty (An operation to repair a damaged blood vessel or unblock a coronary artery. The doctor assured me that I would not need an open heart surgery to rectify this problem, and that was comforting too.

"The transplant was finally scheduled for Monday morning and it was now official that Emmanuel would receive the third graft. That Monday morning, Emmanuel got very ill and I had to clean him and prepare him for the theatre. Our mum also arrived that morning to help and encourage us. Moreover, the latest development about Eunice was cause for worry among the whole family back home.

"As the donor, I got into the operation theatre first. I saw Emmanuel get wheeled into a different theatre room. I looked at him in the face and waved at him. He waved back and smiled. From a distance I saw mum looking at us intensely. It was hard to guess what was on her mind then. But she must have been going through some kind of hell watching her two kids being wheeled into the theatre at the same time. This was not the first time, though I am sure these are the scenes in life that no one can get used to. She had a number of friends to keep her company. As I lay on the bed the doctors engaged me in multiple chit chat and soon I drifted off into unconsciousness.

"The doctor used a new process called laparoscopy (a small incision into the abdominal cavity) to harvest the kidney. This process left only a small scar on the abdomen that would later heal quickly."

Eunice continues, "I cannot tell how long I was on that dreaded bed, but they were still working on Emmanuel by the time I came round. I

was placed in the recovery room, where I met my mum and friends. They were very excited to see me alive, albeit in a haze of confusion from the side effects of the anaesthesia. As my head cleared up, I had only one question, 'how is Emmanuel?' They reassured me that all was well and encouraged me to rest."

Emmanuel's mother took up the narrative and shed more light into what transpired at that time: "Hours later the doctors were through with Emmanuel in what they called one of the most successful transplants. They transferred him to CCU, where he was keenly observed by a number of dedicated nurses. The following day, I went to the CCU to see Emmanuel. I was so happy to see him awake. We talked and he was upbeat. According to Eunice, the doctors noted that the graft was the closest match that he ever received."



*Emmanuel in India during the first transplant with friends from India (note his height then)*

"Everyone was happy with the results," Eunice continues to narrate; "Later, the doctors advised that I should be discharged soonest to avoid any contaminations or infections which can be a threat to the kidney. Our cousin had left before us for home and mum took great care of us. A few weeks later we were on board a flight heading for Kenya."

On arrival at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, we were welcomed by scores of family members, relatives and friends who had been waiting for us eagerly. We headed home and as usual had a thanksgiving mass to thank God for all he had taken us through."

## **The Third Kidney Fails: Devastation**

Emmanuel continued to go for tests at Kenyatta hospital to confirm that everything was okay. "This time we were all hopeful. This was the third kidney transplant. It better work," Emmanuel recounted.

As fate may have it, one month later as the doctor was examining Emmanuel, he alerted him of some anomalies he had noted. The doctors were convinced that something was terribly wrong with the graft.

"When Emmanuel told us about the doctor's report, we were all shocked. 'This cannot be happening again!' We thought. How, and the doctors had assured us that he got the best kidney, the closest match he had ever received? How would the body reject this one too?" wondered Eunice.

"We soon realized that Emmanuel's case was very urgent and a flight had to be booked immediately for Emmanuel to go back to India, alone. Emmanuel recalls, "We called our Indian friends and we informed them of the latest development and they were very sad too. We were in constant communication with the doctors also. To say the least, I was very disappointed. I couldn't stop asking myself, why it was happening again."

It was indeed hard for Eunice or other family members to comprehend what was going on. But they had to accept it.

"On arrival, I found the doctors ready and waiting for me," Emmanuel narrated. They were also intrigued by the development. Emmanuel remembers the doctors trying very hard to resuscitate this kidney but *it was a little bit too late*. I lost the third kidney.

The news of the failed third kidney hit everyone with devastating effect. This was demoralizing and disheartening to Emmanuel's father. What was happening? How would doctors waste three kidneys?

Emmanuel's dad was distressed by the fact that all the efforts and sacrifices had come to nil. They were back to square one.

"These experiences were overwhelming," Emmanuel continued. "The doctors scratched their heads harder to figure out the cause of the phenomenon. What followed was a string of complicated tests that lasted for days. Eventually, one day the professor in charge of the institute came over with some very sad news for me. I was suffering from a condition they called 'Lupus Nephritis.' This condition causes the body to reject anything foreign like the implants due to high numbers of antibodies. The implication was that I could not be a candidate for any other transplant. I had to continue with dialysis throughout my life.

"This was the most devastating news in my life. After three kidney transplants, all the financial expenses, a myriad of prayers from my family, friends and I, the problem was as fresh as the first time I made my first journey to India.

"I had never felt so lost and alone. My world seemed to be caving in. I had so many questions in my mind and they seemed to whirl freely all over my head. But I did not lose hope. I remember telling them that we serve a sovereign God and my kidneys will open up one day, if it be His will. The doctors stared at each other in disbelief. For them, they understood that in a situation of chronic kidney failure, the kidneys remain forever inactive; they never open. Indeed, that is according to them and human wisdom. But the doctors were not done with me yet.

## **Prepare to Die in Three Months**

Without any doubt, Emmanuel has gone through a lot in life. But nonetheless, nothing can prepare one enough for eventualities like death.

It was clear that he wasn't going to be a candidate for another transplant anytime soon. His condition had deteriorated so much that one of the doctors decided to prepare him even for the life ahead: "Your life will be dependent on dialysis. Please attend the dialysis sessions."

Emmanuel continues, "The closest Indian couple to us had been given some very disturbing news by the professor in charge – that I had only a slim chance of surviving beyond three months, mainly because of the intense medications and procedures done on me. I went and confirmed the same from the professor himself. I was not startled at all by the news. I had undergone many unpredictable and disheartening situations and had gone through them all by faith. I remember telling the doctors that only my God knew my fate.

*At that juncture, I simply made this prayer to my Lord: 'Oh Jesus, my living and eternal God, thank you for your providence, grace and blessing. Let every beat of my heart be a new hymn of thanksgiving to you. Oh loving God, let every drop of my blood in me circulate for your glory. Dear Lord, my soul sings songs of adoration for your mercy. I love you, God, for whom you are alone.'*

After a brief intense silence, Emmanuel continued, "As I packed to leave the hospital, I had some new faith, a vision and revamped determination in life. Today as I recount this story, it is almost a decade since the doctors declared that I had only a slim chance of living beyond three months. I am still alive for the glory of God."

After having done over 5,000 successful kidney transplants, Sadly Dr. Trivedi died on 3rd October 2019. May his soul rest in peace.

## **Cost of Dialysis**

"Every day as I wake up, I am constantly clear about one thing: dialysis is the only way for me to remove toxic waste from my body. Until such a time that my God will replenish my kidneys with life, I have to go through this process somehow," said Emmanuel looking into the distance in deep thought. "If I don't go for dialysis, I will die, you know," he said, as he turned to look at me.

Dialysis is a fascinating process during which a patient's blood is extracted, purified by a dialysis machine and returned to the patient through thin pipes connected to them. There are more than 8,000 people in Kenya who are on dialysis treatment.



For Emmanuel and many other patients with renal failure, dialysis is a matter of life and death. In Kenya, kidney-related ailments have become a silent nemesis that is killing and tormenting many families. Government data shows that about four million Kenyans have some form of kidney disease, and many progress to the last stage without being diagnosed. It is estimated that each year, Kenya registers about 10,000 new kidney patients in need of dialysis. Out of these, only about 200 receive the service as the charges are still astronomically high for many people.

At present, Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), the biggest referral hospital in Kenya, is simply overwhelmed by the number of people in need of dialysis services. Every day, about 60 patients use the dialysis machines at KNH. The hospital also performs 30 kidney transplants annually.

Kenyatta National Hospital has been offering the lowest dialysis fees among all hospitals offering this service, and hence it has been attracting patients from all parts of the country. Until 2016, a dialysis session at KNH has been costing Ksh5,000 (\$50), with patients covered by the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) paying only half of the amount. In private hospitals, the charges range from Ksh7,000 (\$70) and Ksh13,000 (\$130). In a country where the biggest percentage of the population earns less than \$2 per day, the dialysis rates at KNH are still out of reach for many people.

In 2016, the government came to the rescue of kidney patients and adjusted covered most of the dialysis cost. The Fund will pay Ksh10,000 (\$100) per session of kidney dialysis, up from Ksh2,000 (\$20), while patients undergoing a kidney transplant will get a Ksh500,000 (\$5,000) cover, up from Ksh200,000 (\$2,000).

In addition, many kidney patients have to make long trips twice a week for dialysis, incurring heavy travel costs on top of medication and the procedure.

So, how does Emmanuel make it through these challenges? I posed this question to him one day and he gave me an incredible story of how God's favour floated over him like the sun lighting his way even in the darkest financial moments of his life.



"Let me tell you my brother, this is one of the most difficult parts of my life. It is a constant struggle for me," Emmanuel said thoughtfully. "First, the dialysis kits are very costly. I have often had to struggle to get them. I remember this gentleman called Peter Kanja who used to sell dialysis kits. At the time I met him, I needed the kits badly. I had just gone through parathyroidectomy (a surgical removal of the parathyroid glands). The physician had directed that I attend the dialysis sessions three times a week. We talked at length as I tried to explain my situation to him. But my offer was too low and he couldn't sell the kits to me. Kanja struck me as a great person though, and didn't feel bad about the failed deal.

"Later, I approached the management of Lions Hospital (a private hospital in Nairobi) and prayed that God would make them understand my situation. By the grace of the Almighty God, Lions Hospital management agreed to give me all the items for free. I couldn't believe the outcome. This is a private hospital and God had touched them... and they had offered to help me. In addition, the management allowed me to dialyze at their facility twice per week, all for free. Speaking of miracles, this is one of them that I can never explain.

"A few months later, the machines at Lions Hospital malfunctioned and I had to look for an alternative. This was bad news for me. The management had been very kind to me. This was becoming indeed hectic and serious moment for me.

"I knew it was possible for me to get the dialysis services at Karen Hospital (a private hospital), but I wasn't sure how I would get the dialysis kit. So, I decided to approach the management at Lions Hospital again and pleaded with them to assist me with the kits until I got some other sources. I wasn't sure they would grant my request. Surprisingly they agreed to continue providing dialysis kits for free, as I dialyzed at Karen hospital."

After a short pause, Emmanuel stood up to stretch a little, and then he continued, "For about one and half years, I dialyzed at Karen Hospital, but as fate would have it, I started running out of dialysis kits and had to buy them. I ran out of funds and could only afford the kits with great difficulty. The prospect of not attending a dialysis session was really

depressing to me. I couldn't imagine missing a dialysis session because my body was already very weak; attending the procedure was a matter of life and death for me. I kept on praying every day that God may open a way for me.

One day, as I was dialyzing at Karen Hospital, deep in thought and very worried because I couldn't figure out how I would get the next session, a man came and stood by my bed. It was Kanja, the friend I had talked about earlier.

He was surprised to see me at Karen because he knew it was a costly place to have dialysis. What he did not know is that I was not paying a cent; God had made everything possible through well-wishers who had offered to help for free. Later, I disclosed my problems and worries to him. Particularly, I informed him that I had no idea where I would get the kits for next dialysis session. He was indeed moved by my request.

He asked me to list for him what I need and this I did. They all amounted to Ksh6,500 (\$65) at Karen Hospital. From that moment to the time of this publication, my friend Kanja has been supplying my dialysis kits. Kanja has been a great source of encouragement to me. He tells me not to worry, he will supply the kits as long as he has them and God has provided.

It is three years now since I started dialyzing at Karen Hospital. The cost would be mindboggling if I were to calculate. But God intervened and has remained faithful. I trust this God now and for my future supplies. I am sure he will open a way for me."

## **Living Without a Kidney: The Fears and Anxieties**

The biggest impact of this disease on parents is the constant worry of the person ailing. "Your mind becomes a prisoner of worry and fear of any eventualities. "There is a lot of uncertainty for us as parents. We need money to have him go for dialysis twice or thrice every week. You cannot think of other projects; Emmanuel has become my project. I have to constantly think about him, set aside some money for his care and give him more attention," explained Emmanuel's father.



*Volunteers at Regina Pacis Food helping Emmanuel prepare some delicacies for sale.*



*Emmanuel and Gathoni (a volunteer) preparing some delicacies for sale.*

But Emmanuel, despite his condition, is not the kind of person to sit around waiting for help. He is creative and entrepreneurial. He started a small business using his catering skills. He would cook a variety of delicacies and supply them to the local shops and stores. Sometimes, he would get "outside catering" jobs during weddings and other events, which he would handle very well with help from his team, which he himself had trained. The proceeds have funded his dialysis expenses and purchase of prescribed drugs.

## **Amazing Trust in God!**

Emmanuel is a deeply religious person. He believes in the power of prayer. Not even sickness can change his faith in God. His day begins and ends in prayer. One day as we talked, he gave me the following testimony:

"I begin the day with Holy Mass. God is always merciful to us. He listens to each prayer made by a sincere heart. Even when I was on a hospital bed ailing in India, God made his presence known to us through his servants, for instance the bishop from Sudan, who always had time for Mass with us by the hospital bed. He would celebrate Mass for and with us every day, and anoint the sick. He used to take us through the sharing of the word of God and the body of Christ.

"Even when I was in the Critical Care Unit (CCU) in India, I was constantly served with the body of Christ. It was broken into small pieces convenient for me to swallow. At such helpless moments in the face of adversity, my heart glowed with unexplainable joy because I knew I had the body of Christ in my soul. Though my body was constantly withered, frail and weak to a point that I often pitied myself, I never felt so in my soul."

A few days later, Emmanuel continued from where he stopped: "The time I spent in India was like a retreat moment for me; a time to meditate more and more about the goodness of the Lord. It was a moment to re-examine my entire life and my journey with Christ. It was a moment to reflect about His holy grace and mercy. And though my whole body ached through and through, my soul was at peace.

"I constantly engaged my Lord in little chats. I knew he was and is always close to me. He was the only person I could talk to about my fears, my dreams, my failures and my anxieties, especially during those dark moments. I found real consolation in the Lord and I still do. God's indefinite goodness was and is always with me.

"I am told that one day when in India, I lost consciousness while at the CCU. When the doctors came for their usual rounds, they touched my cold feet and shook their heads: "No hope," they seemed to communicate silently. My mother who was standing by could hardly hold her tears. The doctors' reactions broke her heart. She cried a lot and prayed deeply for me. Amazingly, after some time, I came round, much to her delight.

"Life is very interesting. When you think your case is urgent or critical, there are others who just see it as a normal day for them," Emmanuel said with a seemingly light laugh. "I recall during the same period that I was in the CCU in India, one of the nurses forgot to take the usual clinical tests normally done on the patients in CCU. Such tests and records are critical for survival of the graft and the kidney patient. Every hour tests are done on urine, blood sugars, BP, etc.

"That day, when the doctors came for their usual rounds they noticed the anomaly and asked the nurse why she had not done the required tests on me. The nurse, in an unconcerned tone told the doctor that she had forgotten. My brother was very incensed by her behaviour, he nearly slapped some sense into her mind. Of course my brother was in pain because, he had not healed the scars after donating the kidney and someone was joking around with the same kidney he had just donated.

"I am constantly in pain and in deep agony. But though the pains and the torture on my body are indescribable sometimes, the light of Christ protects me from the shadows of death, so that I can witness our God's goodness through and through. During my lowest moments, my friends give up hope of ever meeting me alive again. They fear that death would swallow me up. But by the grace of God, I spring back from the alleys of death. My Lord keeps me above the jaws of death, so that I can be a living testimony of his goodness, grace and mercy. Nothing can separate me from the love of my God."

## Good Friends Sent by God

Gathoni is one of the few friends who have interacted with Emmanuel on a daily basis. According to her, Emmanuel is one person with an enduring character never known to her before. "One thing I came to know about Emmanuel is that he rarely wants to bother people with his problems," she said.

The urge to be independent led Emmanuel to look for a house away from home. He wanted to feel like a mature person who would have an independent life on his own. He got a house at Ruiru town, and this is where he and Gathoni met for the first time. It is at Ruiru where he established his small business of selling cookies to get money for dialysis. Later, he moved the business home, to a small house that his dad had built for him.

"It is after relocation from Ruiru that we got into a real financial crisis," Gathoni reflects. "The small business was not doing well at all because of his frequent travels for medical attention and the expensive dialysis sessions. Sometimes we would run out of food but Emmanuel would not tell his parents about it. However, Emmanuel's mother is very generous. Occasionally, she would drop by to check on us and every time she carried some foodstuffs for us.

"I would feel sad every time I visited my own mother at home. I would have no money to buy something for her. This was contrary to societal expectations. My community believes that, *"Mucii nduceraguo moko matheri"* (You don't visit your parents' home empty handed). I promised my mother that I would buy something for her as soon as I got another job that paid better. But she would insist that I continue helping Emmanuel for a few more days before I got that kind of a job.

"Emmanuel had recently visited our home and my mum liked him very much. She liked his optimism and courage in facing life, despite the great challenges that he faced every day.

"Most of the other employees deserted us because Emmanuel's small business was not doing well and their payment would often get delayed. I couldn't bring myself to that point of deserting Emmanuel. I



would hate to see him suffer more than I had already seen. I just felt I had to stay around longer.

I desired to get married like many of my friends who had done so. Indeed, I would be married today if I deserted Emmanuel. I have had three boyfriends who have had to leave me for other girls after long waits for my hand in marriage. But I just couldn't bring myself to desert Emmanuel at his point of need. I was not sure if I would have derived happiness and peace in marriage with such thoughts hovering over my mind. I would have lived with so much guilt within me and I would not have wanted something like that to happen. So, I have no regrets for the decision I made."

After a short spell of silence, Gathoni continued, "Sometimes life takes us through deep and rough terrain. Emmanuel would at times get very low health-wise and financially simultaneously. I felt helpless during such times because I didn't have resources to bail him out of his predicaments. Often, at such times, God would bail us out through friends. Nonetheless, when I look back, I am forever grateful to God for taking us through such hard times.

"I remember this particular day when Emmanuel was very low financially. He could not raise enough money for dialysis and didn't want to bother anyone by seeking help. That is his nature anyway. He looked distressed the whole morning. It was not very clear to me what was really bothering him and therefore, I closely watched his every movement. After restless movements, he went and sat in the family car that was parked outside. It was a dark blue saloon car and it must have been very hot inside.

"I cautioned him about the heat but he wouldn't listen to me. He was sweating profusely but despite my protests, he was still adamant. I got really scared and asked him why he was subjecting himself to such heat and he had an explanation all figured out. "Sweating is another way for the body to release the dirt besides dialysis," he quipped and closed the door of the car. So according to him, this was another form of dialysis.

"I have never been so scared in my life. He went ahead and rolled up the vehicle's windows and this got my heart in my mouth. I could hardly concentrate on my work. I knew that car gets very hot inside, and one could easily faint or die in it. So I kept checking on him. A few minutes later I checked again and I couldn't see him. I nearly screamed. I was shaking with fear. I felt weak and couldn't open the door of the car. I was sure he had fainted. I called another lady to come and help me. She was older than me and more courageous.

"My guess was right. Emmanuel had fainted in the car because of the heat. This lady got Emmanuel out of the car, washed him and laid him on a couch in the house. After resting for some time, he finally came round. That was a really scary moment for me.

Therefore, beyond what people think they know or have heard from Emmanuel himself, I want to tell you that he sometimes goes through hell. He often gets excruciatingly painful episodes after dialysis that gives all of us sleepless nights."

"For instance," Gathoni recalls. "I remember this particular moment when Emmanuel's leg was painful. He was going through untold agony and no prescription seemed to work for him. He had taken enough painkillers, but the pain persisted. I will never forget that night. Emmanuel sat on the couch and groaned in pain. I warmed some water and begun to massage his leg. Massage often eased his pain but that day, the pain wouldn't subside. He continued to groan in pain and this was heart-breaking for me. I had done all I could but nothing seemed to relieve his pain. Tears flowed freely from my eyes.

"It was late in the night but Emmanuel suggested that we had to go out and look for some medicine. Well, we could use the family car, but I didn't know how to drive. The parents lived about 400 metres away from our house, and they were sound asleep. Emmanuel did not want to bother them, therefore he had to drive.

"The nearest shopping centre was about four kilometres away. We set off for the shopping centre, although we were not sure we would get the medicine he required at that hour of the night. He yelled and groaned in pain throughout the short journey to the shopping centre. I



cried a lot that night. Fortunately, we got the medicine and the pain subsided after a short while.

"The following day as we recalled and joked about the previous night, he sympathized with me and encouraged me to be strong despite his situation. He disclosed to me that the tears he saw rolling down my cheeks touched his heart, but he didn't know what to do at that moment of great anguish.

"This was just one of those many nights that many people will never know about as far as Emmanuel's life is concerned.

"By the way, I have cried for many nights as I listened to Emmanuel painfully groan himself into sleep with pain. I would say a prayer for him before dozing off, too. Surprisingly, God always heard our prayers and He would heal him in the wee hours of the night. The following day, Emmanuel would wake up joyfully at 5:45am and get ready for Holy Mass, which he never missed. You could hardly know whether he had been under such excruciating pain the night before.

"Emmanuel believed that nothing was worth skipping the morning Mass. 'I would rather miss my dialysis session than the Holy Mass,' he often said. Of course, he knew that without dialysis he wouldn't last. Therefore, I used to wake him up and help him prepare for the Mass, sometimes amid episodes of pain all over his body whenever the pain continued to the following morning. At such times, his preparations would take longer than usual because most of his bones ached. Sometimes, it was too much and I had to literally help him dress up."

Another brief moment, as if to compose herself after fighting back tears, and Gathoni continues: "Emmanuel believes in prayers so much, and I believe God answers his prayers. When he is not praying, he is reading spiritual books or preaching to people – he likes that a lot.

"We often engaged in all manner of talk as we worked or rested in the house, and one day he told me something that I will never forget. We were discussing about family issues and bringing up children. As we were talking, I told him how I would want to have a child of my own. I was very sincere; I desired to have a child at one point in my young life like

other young ladies of my age. If Emmanuel would have allowed us to continue staying in his premises and working for him after getting my baby, then I wouldn't have minded. So, as I toyed with the idea, I asked him what he thought about it.

"He listened keenly and thoughtfully as I explained everything to him. I couldn't guess what was boiling in his mind. He looked at me for a moment and politely said, 'You know what, I now see that you desire to have a family and that is a great desire. But as you know, I won't be for the idea that you get a baby outside marriage. I suggest that you seek God's blessing by having your relationship blessed in holy matrimony. By the way, feel free to take your life to the next level.' He also told me he didn't want to be a stumbling block in my life.

His words of wisdom sparked off in me a deep-seated desire to have my own family. He knew that I had a boyfriend who lived in the neighbourhood and he had told me that the guy would make a good life partner. True to his words, I am married to this man today; he is a great husband and a dad to my children."

Gathoni never lacked appreciative words to describe Emmanuel. She says fondly, "For sure, I had never thought I would leave my brother; he truly is my brother to date. He took me for a real sister and never wanted anyone to play around with my life or my feelings. He cautioned me about relations where he suspected that people were out to exploit me. Sometimes, I feel like he is a guardian angel and never want leave his company, for what he anticipates happens for the better.

"Before, meeting Emmanuel, I rarely went to church. I was also arrogant and often used offensive language. But, it is amazing how our way of life can influence those around us. I have since become a prayerful person and never miss a Sunday service. I have learnt to be patient with people and I ceased using offensive language. I have changed for the better, something which has also made my parents to like him.

"Indeed, most of Emmanuel's friends thought that I was his wife, but such rumours and insinuations did not bother me at all. We used to be together most of the time. We would go out together to supply

cookies and other delicacies to the local shops; we would talk and joke a lot about life, his physical/ health condition, and this is something that made me loosen up on my own life challenges. I can confidently say that I view my challenges from a totally different perspective.

"Emmanuel made me know and meet many prominent people in our country. I remember once I had to go and meet the then Minister of Health, Professor Peter Anyang' Nyong'o. I remember I had gone for his medical report from the DMS (Director of Medical Services) for his travel to India. That is when I got to meet the minister at the DMS's office and shook his hand.



*Gathoni with her firstborn— one year later after getting married*

"I cannot exhaust the many times Emmanuel has helped me out, but there is this one time that I will never forget. A time had come for me to get married after being in courtship for a long time. I wanted to skip a church wedding because in Kenya, church weddings can be costly. Emmanuel was very unhappy with this decision and we had a lengthy talk about it. I knew he meant well for me and my husband to be.

"Things were getting tricky for me because my husband-to-be would not understand why I insisted on having a church wedding, despite the cost implications. He had no sound financial grounding, but I loved him anyway and God intervened. We had no funds but through Emmanuel, our friends, family and relatives we did it. As a trained caterer, Emmanuel took care of food and beverages, his sister Eunice took care of the decorations and Emmanuel's friends (who were already my friends) supported me in other activities. Finally, I made my vows in a colourful church wedding. God answered our prayers. My colourful wedding silenced the rumourmongers, who had convinced all the gullible people around that I had been married to Emmanuel.

"Leaving Emmanuel was not an easy decision to make, but indeed, God's plans are not man's. God has remained faithful to Emmanuel and Emmanuel has not lacked in anyway," said Gathoni.

## **What Gives Emmanuel the Strength?**

Emmanuel has strong faith in God. Sometimes when I visited the family, I would find them at their lowest. It was becoming evident that with time the sickness was sucking the joy out of this young man whom many had described as always jovial. Prolonged illness has a way of draining happiness from the whole family. As Emmanuel's mother recounted to me:

"When my son is in agony, I am also in agony. Everyone is in agony. How can you be peaceful when he is groaning? You can't! This disease has taken a toll on all of us. For instance, my health has also deteriorated a lot since my son got ill. I started developing a heart condition that I have no idea how it came about. When I visited a cardiologist, I was informed that my heart had enlarged and apparently there was nothing much that could be done about it. I was given some prescription that I am on, to date. Sometimes, I think this heart condition has been caused by the stress that my family members and I have gone through. I think a lot about my son. People tell me not to, but how can I stop thinking about my own son?



*Support and love from the family — Emmanuel with his sister Maryann*



*From left, the late Emmanuel's dad; Emmanuel's mum; Emmanuel; the late Bishop Akio Johnson from Sudan; and Paul, Bishop's kidney donor - in India, 2005*

Interestingly, my heart condition improved after some time, particularly when Emmanuel seemed to take charge of his life. Emmanuel is one person who rarely wants to be seen as a burden to anyone. Therefore, he keeps on trying different ideas to generate funds for his weekly treatment. He has with time become a great source of encouragement to me. His acceptance of his situation has given us peace. Emmanuel took back his personality. He stopped worrying and surrendered his fate to God. That gave all of us the much needed rest.

As a mother, what gives me constant strength is the knowledge and belief that God's love is still abundant on us. I recall many times when we had to witness people die at the entrance of that very hospital we were seeking treatment. My son did not die on the way. He is still alive and we thank God.

Every time I looked around during our stay in India, I noted far worse cases than ours. In short, I realized that sometimes when faced with the illnesses and other difficulties of life, we get so consumed by our experiences that we hardly get time to scan our environment and appreciate what others are going through. When you look around, you will find people who are going through a worse situation than your own.

In fact, at some point while in India, I and my husband would walk around talking to other families from all over the world – Nigeria, South Africa, and Cameroon, among others, encouraging them despite what we were going through. We told them about the loving God whom we still trust despite all the problems we were facing and they were greatly encouraged."

## **The Amazing Barber**

Emmanuel's unique social skills have enabled him to connect with people of all kinds. One day he wrote to me via WhatsApp:

"God is truly merciful my brother. He brings on my way even the humblest that I have ever known. I came across this gentleman in Kiambu town as I was looking for a barber. He was a trainee barber and most of the customers would not want to have trainees experiment on



them. But, to me he looked good and confident. He was very happy that I gladly accepted his services. We talked briefly about life. Later, a friend of his who knew me well narrated my whole life story to him. He was greatly moved by the account. The next time I visited him he revealed this to me and offered to be giving me a haircut for free anytime I needed one. It is more than three years now since I met this young man. He has faithfully fulfilled his promise. God shall indeed bless him for his kindness.

"One day, he got wind that I was raising funds for my medication. He mobilized the residents of the shopping centre, many of whom I had never met before, to contribute towards the fund. I used to miss medication sometimes because of the limited funds, but when I look back I see God Ebenezer. I have had friends who have offered to fuel our family car once in a while. What true friends that God gave me? I do pray for them always."

## **Life is Like a Rose**

For Emmanuel, the setbacks caused by the illness provided him with moments of reflection. He once wrote to me: "People say that life is full of goodness and sweetness, others say life is full of challenges; I say it's a combination of all these things. Sometimes people attribute life's challenges to bad luck, curses or misfortunes; I look at life as a rose – its beauty signifies life's goodness, its thorns are the challenges we face every day. They prick us for a short time, to make us better and more refined, to protect us from damning pride, and for the ultimate salvation of our souls. More often than not, we come out of these challenges better, stronger, and more refined.

"Challenges should not overwhelm us, but we should always wear a deep resolve to overcome the challenges. Sometimes we have our own little doubts. We wonder if these challenges are from God because of their nature or intensity. From Job's story we, learn that nothing gets to us – good or bad – without God's knowledge. We also learn that the devil asks for permission to do whatever he wishes with our bodies. I write to you my story to judge if it was of God or otherwise.

"As I narrate this story (in 2016), I am turning 32. Since 2001, when I was first diagnosed with renal condition at Kijabe Hospital, I have seen nothing but God's favour. I have been largely on dialysis since 2002, and God's providence over my life still abounds. When I look back, I think this condition has made my resolve to seek God and my longing to abide by His will only stronger.

"Socially, living in this condition can be agonizing because even the close friends that you had so much trust in could desert you. Sometimes loneliness abounds, but if you have supportive relatives and friends, life becomes easier to handle.

"I remember this friend I met at Kenyatta National Hospital during one of my dialysis sessions. He used to travel from Mombasa all alone for medical attention at KNH. He used to recount to me how lonely he felt. According to him, no one wanted to be associated with him. His family and friends believed he was bewitched. One day my friend travelled back home from Nairobi only to find that his parents had moved and did not disclose to anyone their new destination.

"This was a major and devastating blow to him. He was tired and sick. To him life was simply unbearable. He sat somewhere deep in thought. He felt like the whole world had collapsed before his very eyes. Then, from a distance, he saw a fruit vendor going about his business. He walked gently to the vendor and bought a whole ripe pineapple.

"I believe as the vendor prepared the pineapple, many things went through the young man's mind. He knew taking a ripe pineapple was suicidal for him as a renal patient. The dieticians caution renal patients against taking meals containing high sources of potassium. Pineapple has an amazing concentration of potassium. He sat down and painfully consumed the whole sweet and juicy pineapple, knowing well it would be his last. Indeed, it was.

"Friends have been a great source of encouragement in my life. I thank God every day for my friends. I have been privileged to have great friends in my life. Friends who have been there for me and who have sacrificed their time and resources to be by my side and comfort me. I constantly thank my Creator and pray to Him to protect these friends. To me, they are God-sent angels.



"It is true that sorrow brings us closer to God. Physically, we may grow weak and fatigued; our bodies may lose their glamour and get deformed as it is my case. With a painful hump on my back, I may not be a site to behold for many. Extensive pain may torture our bodies as it has been in my case. But all these should never vanquish our resolve to trust and love our God.

"Suffering for me has become a part of my life and a sure reminder of God's grace. Attending Holy Mass is for me not a routine, but a special moment with my Creator. I have had these special moments with my Creator every single day of my life. I know that my inner peace comes from Him. I know that the healing of all infirmities comes from our God. Our faith in God remains our only hope of victory against our adversities.

Sometimes, my friends tell me that the deeper you get to relate with God, the more suffering that comes your way. But I have made up my mind. If such truths hold, then my fate is sealed. I will trudge on. The name Emmanuel has become synonymous with suffering for many who know me. In fact, I have heard some people say they would think twice before giving the name "Emmanuel" to their new born babies.

# Chapter 7

## Faith in the Furnace

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*  
— **Hebrew 11.1**

Emmanuel's experiences have greatly shaped the faith of many people who have taken time to listen to him. "Having witnessed all the things Emmanuel has gone through, I have found a reaffirmation of my faith in God. I strongly believe it is God who looks after Emmanuel, and it is Him who renews Emmanuel's strength as well as our strength and our spiritual faith," confessed Emmanuel's father.

A steadfast Catholic, Emmanuel's father had a strong conviction that God had a great lesson that He wants everybody to learn about His grace and faithfulness through Emmanuel. Emmanuel's dad had a lot to say about some vital lessons he had learnt through Emmanuel's trials in life, "This journey of faith has given us as a family courage and the peace that the Bible talks about: 'peace that surpasses all understanding'. This knowledge has further cemented our faith in Him and the understanding that it's Him who created Emmanuel in his own image, and He is in charge.

"God requires of all of us to believe in Him. Emmanuel's passion to see people follow Christ is amazing. While in India, he would preach to the Indian doctors and nurses, and even give them his rosaries. Of course, they would hardly display them openly in such a conservative country where Christianity has not yet taken root, but some would not care but wear their rosaries openly and to Emmanuel, this was a great achievement. The rest is God's to do.

"I saw God's hand when we were in India. We ran out of money in a foreign country. But the hospital did not send us away. For reasons I cannot explain, they got even more interested in Emmanuel's case and renewed their determination to get a lasting solution. At some point the bill ran into hundreds of thousands.

"We were in India for more than six months. But for reasons only God can help us understand, the hospital waived all the arrears away. Post-transplant medication is very costly. Sometimes, he would require medication that would cost more than Ksh75,000 (\$750). The cost would make my face go pale, but God's intervention was always sure. The professor in charge of the hospital would waive the full amount.

"The hospital rooms were equally costly. A room without air conditioning would cost about Ksh1,400 (\$14), while an air-conditioned one would go for Ksh2,000 (\$20) per day. We had opted for the cheaper room because of the cost, but the extreme heat in that country was really taking a toll on us. Unknown to me, one day, Emmanuel walked into the office of the professor in charge of the hospital and requested that they turn the AC on even though we couldn't afford to pay for it. The following day a nurse, fluent in English, came into our room and turned on the AC, which was very refreshing for us. She gave Emmanuel a smile and walked away.

"My son, then disclosed to us that he had spoken to the professor and jokingly as he would do often, he imitated the professor who was fluent in English albeit with an Indian accent, 'Emmanuel, that's all you want? *From today you will not pay for the room charge and the AC, since I am told you have never switched it on illegally as many of the people do. They think we don't know they have turned the AC on. But they will pay eventually for we have records.*' We will always give God the glory.

"During our stay in India, God brought many friends to us. We met Catholic priests and church members whom we will always be indebted to, because of their assistance. Though we were going through a lot of tribulations, we emerged stronger spiritually and the whole experience strengthened our resolve to believe and trust in God. It also made us more united as a family for truly all this was being done by God."

His father described Emmanuel as quiet and strong-willed. "He doesn't want to be pitied. Sometimes he will keep quiet even when his body is aching. He does this often because he doesn't want to be a burden to me, his dad."

"Amazingly, he has faith that one day his kidneys will work again the way they used to work when he was a kid. He says that one day, God will heal him. This faith keeps him moving and this is the same faith we all hold as a family and that's why we do not give up on him."

Emmanuel's father advises families going through this kind of situation that they should not blame themselves for what they are going through. It's only God who understands it all. In addition, they shouldn't set themselves apart from the people they socialize with. Social support is crucial at such times. The people from the local church where Emmanuel's family worship have been of great help.

## **The Priest**

Sitting with Fr Michael Ndichu, the Dean of Kiambu Deanery and the father-in-charge of the Our Lady of Holy Rosary Parish, Ting'ang'a, I found that indeed Emmanuel was and is a hero in the faith. Fr Ndichu recalled vividly that he came to know Emmanuel as he (Emmanuel) happily conducted the choir despite the many odds he faced in life. He seemed to derive great joy in what he was doing for the Lord.

Emmanuel met with this spiritual father back in 2008. "I remember vividly in 2008, when I finished my seminary formation, the vocation director sent me to Queen of Apostles Junior Seminary for my pastoral experience. I later moved to Buruburu's Holy Trinity Parish, but once in a while, I would visit Mugumo Outstation, and that is how I came to know Emmanuel's father, Peter Gitau, and his other son, a seminarian, Mumo. As I got to know the family better, I came to learn that Emmanuel was not only passionate about the choir but was also passionate about prayers," said Fr Ndichu.

Fr. Ndichu describes Emmanuel as a young man who is not only of impeccable character, but also demonstrates to the other young people that they can lead a life of commitment to God. "He is a young man who has a very strong devotion towards the Eucharist. For him, Mass comes first."

Emmanuel has immensely contributed towards the formation of Holy Family Mugumo Catholic choir as well as his local Small Christian

Community, St Francis of Assisi. "Once you encounter Emmanuel, you will notice how strong in character he is. He will always promise you his prayers and also request you to pray for him. He is such a prayer warrior," said Fr Ndichu.

"For Emmanuel, acceptance of his situation has been key toward his healing and entire life. Always have a recourse to God, He is the power behind everyone and everything, and He can change any situation. Never pity yourself; the future holds much for you. We must remain strong in Christ at all times, even during the worst trials in our lives – let's be strong. Happiness makes life sweet; trials keep us strong; sorrows keep us human; and failures keep us humble. God will keep us going on in all these circumstances," added Fr. Ndichu.

## **The Role of Enemies in Our Lives!**

Emmanuel's deep reflections about life have helped him conjure his own philosophies of life. One day, Emmanuel wrote to me:

"While I was pondering about life, I discovered that sometimes for you to succeed in life you need enemies! Yes! You need people who will mock you so that you can turn to God.

You need people who will try to intimidate you, so that the courage in you can be unleashed.

You need people who will disappoint you, so that you can put all your trust in God alone.

You need people who will retrench you, for you to begin your own big business.

You need people who will sell you like biblical Joseph, for you to get to Egypt and be the king in a foreign land.

You need a cruel landlord so that you won't be too comfortable in someone else's house.

When we get disappointed, we feel very bad and sometimes we tend to remain on that spot.

Disappointments have a way of blinding us from the opportunities around us.

How can you see a new open door while your attention, time and energy are all spent in trying to force the closed one open? Let go!

Disappointments come loaded with blessings. Keenly study your situation before giving up. So, when disappointments come your way, whine less and thank God more. Pray to Him to open your eyes so that you can see the new blessing that He has set aside for you!

I guess the reason we talk of BREAKTHROUGH is because something must BREAK, so that you can get THROUGH!"

## **My Neighbour**

"The first time I heard about Emmanuel, he was going for his third transplant. I didn't know him well since I had recently moved to the neighbourhood. I heard about him from his sister Eunice and brother Mumo. The more I heard about the tribulations he had gone through, the more I longed to meet him," said John Njenga

"The first day I saw him in the church, he struck me as an exceptional young man. By and by, I have come to know him and nothing amazes me like his steadfast faith in God. He is one of the very few young men I have come across who understands what we mean when we say "fully submit to the will of God."

"Additionally, Emmanuel is a young man with an amazing vigour, his health condition notwithstanding. I would often stare at him in amazement as he led the choir every Sunday displaying immense zeal and energy. He really challenged me in a number of ways. His devotion to God's service touched the core of my heart.

"Inspiration comes from very many sources. Emmanuel has tremendously changed my outlook to life. He has taught me a lot about being selfless when serving God and His people. In his case he ignores his pain and challenges and gets submerged into worship and service for his Maker.

"For a long time that I had attended our church, I consciously avoided positions of service. Leadership in churches had become

controversial, and I did not want to be exposed to it. Leadership in the church has become a platform of sowing discord and enmity among church members. I believe the prevailing conflicts in churches, particularly among church leaders, had dissuaded me from desiring such roles despite constant persuasion by the elders of our church to take up the treasurer's role.

"Every time this request was put across by the church elders, I gave an excuse and declined the offer. But one day, as I watched Emmanuel play his role in the church so diligently, my resistance to serving in the church melted away. I sat there and for a moment and thought:

*Here is a young man who has been through indescribable pain and physical tribulations, yet he was so zealous and selfless in the service of the Lord. God has blessed me with good health and I rarely get sick. I know that I am stronger than Emmanuel physically, but yet have no desire to serve the Lord in the church.' This really bothered me a lot.*

"Emmanuel's family members happen to be strong Catholics. Members of our local church, Holy Family Mugumo Catholic Church, love the family so much. Every time, upon returning from India for his treatment, Emmanuel would be warmly welcomed by the congregation. The congregants love and support Emmanuel in many ways. We always thanked God for bringing him back safely after going through his treatment. In my opinion, I believe Emmanuel always aspires to use his courage and determination in life not only to challenge and encourage, but also to inspire others."

## **The Family Counsellor**

Abijah Wangithi, a nurse at the Kenyatta National Hospital, happened to be the counsellor who would expound on the misfortunes that had befallen Emmanuel's family. He indeed has a moving account of Emmanuel's life. Abijah met Emmanuel in 2002, soon after he was diagnosed with a serious kidney problem. He was tasked with one of the most daunting responsibility in kidney care services: Counselling the patient and next of kin after kidney failure diagnosis. Often, this is the first step in renal care.

"It was indeed a difficult moment for the family, but Emmanuel's determination was notable from the beginning. He was determined to make it through thick and thin. He struck me as a strong-willed person. He is a real fighter.

"Despite the pain and agony, Emmanuel's positive attitude to life is worth emulating. As a nurse and a counselor, I can tell you that having kidney disease is bad, but I believe having a failed kidney graft is devastating. Yet, Emmanuel has gone through three failed transplants. He is strong-willed. I believe that his faith in God plays a great role in his life. Isaiah the prophet declared that those who trust in God shall have their strength renewed. They shall mount up with wings as eagles."



## Chapter 8

### From Bad to Worse

*So, when disappointments come your way, whine less, but thank God more. Pray to Him to open your eyes so that you can see the new blessing that He has set aside for you!*  
— **Emmanuel**

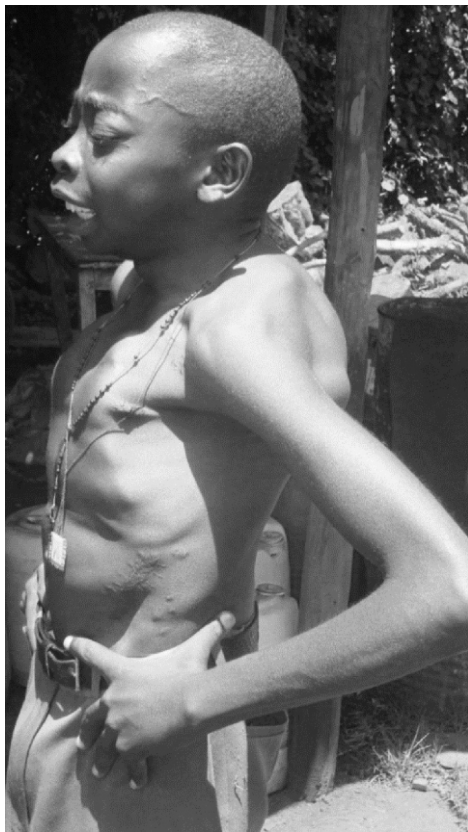
Many days had passed since it became apparent that Emmanuel cannot receive another kidney. Though Emmanuel hoped that things would get better as days went by, he began to note that something was terribly wrong with his body. He had severe pains in his bones that never seemed to go away. But that was not all — his body was shrinking day by day.

His body had become tiny and a hunchback had begun to form below his shoulders. His cheek bone had protruded a bit and his skin complexion was darkening as time went by. If you had seen Emmanuel about five years ago before this disorder, you would have difficulties believing he was the one. Perhaps what would convince you he is the one, would be his jovial character and friendly demeanour that would never be shaken, not even by his physical deformation.

"Many people constantly ask me why I look the way I look and I always launch into protracted explanations about the many surgeries, procedures and medications that I have gone through. I explain about the dialysis process and how it has totally changed my life," says Emmanuel.

One day, Emmanuel joked about his disfigured body with his mum. "I remember one day when my mum looked at my disfigured body and asked me, 'Will these chest bones ever take shape again, my son? Will you ever have that chest we knew... (laughing), but you are still handsome.'"

Emmanuel laughs as he recounts this to me and then tells me that his answer to his mum was simple: "They will mum. They will take shape if God wills."



*Emmanuel demonstrating how the Kidney disease has transformed his body*

"Her concern jolted me, and I decided to look at myself in the mirror that day," Emmanuel continued with the narration smiling, "Wah! I was surprised too. My body had wasted away and I looked really small. I removed all my clothes to have a better view of this strange guy in the mirror. What was happening to me? I started wondering. My legs were thin, my chest had constricted more than I thought and it stood sharply against my broad face..., my body looked frail and different. I was looking at a very different person from the person I knew. I found myself thinking about this for some time and then something told me that the 'Emmanuel in me was still strong and handsome. I quickly made up my mind that my looks shall not define who I was.

"Often, people stared at me openly, and when I smiled back at them, that is the moment they would realize they had been awkwardly staring at me. Sometimes, I would wonder why people were staring at me so hard. Henceforth, I left everything to God."

Emmanuel recounted to me an event that occurred one day when he was driving from his home to Kiambu town. As he drove across one of the streets of Kiambu town, a group of young men curiously stared at him and laughed. One of them exclaimed disparagingly in Gikuyu language, "*Kamundu kau kahana atia? Kahana gakorowe... nitakarakua?*" (How does this fellow look like? He resembles a pig... he

looks like he is dying!). Not knowing whether Emmanuel understood Gikuyu language, they started laughing. When he looked at them, they suspected he had heard and stared elsewhere, ashamed.

According to Emmanuel, they didn't seem to care much. Of course, this kind of talk is demoralizing and has the potential to negatively affect the stigmatized person psychologically and hurt their self-esteem. But surprisingly, Emmanuel took it in his stride. You should have seen him dramatizing how the young men reacted and then laugh it off.

"But my brother, I started wondering ... *how do I look? Why are people staring at me like a ghost? Do I look like some strange creature?*" he asked me... then he laughed it off. I reassured him that in my opinion he was the same strong, jovial and God-loving Emmanuel I have always known. "After all, people will always have something to say about how we look. But what is more important is not what people say about you, as what God says about you," I responded.

But how was the family taking this new development in Emmanuel's body? The family, more than ever, was getting concerned about Emmanuel's health. "We are really concerned about his health. He is constantly in great pain and complains of bone and joint pains. We are hoping that the NHIF will give us some money, as promised, to facilitate his treatment in India again. This rarely happens with NHIF, but Emmanuel has really been praying for a breakthrough. We do not know anyone there, but we know the God of Emmanuel. We believe in Him; He will do something. If I had that money, Emmanuel would be on his way to India for treatment," his mother adds.

## **Soon You Will be on a Wheelchair**

"One day, when Emmanuel went to see a bone specialist, he received some depressing news that made him sink into sadness. The doctor informed him that soon he would be on a wheelchair and may never walk again if he doesn't act fast.

At that time, Emmanuel was using a crutch and it bothered him a lot. His back ached all the time and he could hardly stand for long

because of the pain. Shortly after this news, he approached his church friends who were always there for him and they helped him raise some money for specialized treatment in New Delhi in India," narrated Gathoni.

## **Emmanuel's 14th Surgery in India**

This day, as I talked to Emmanuel, I noticed that he was really down. I felt bad because I could see he was in pain but could do little to help. He couldn't sit on a straight armchair for long. We went to my house because I had one big couch in my room. He liked to stretch himself on it as we talked. When he settled on the couch, he seemed relaxed.

"You know, my brother, I have been going through a lot of pain lately," he said after a short period of silence, "My bones have been paining a lot. Parathyroid are also really troubling me. But you know I have to look for some money."

Days after our talk, Emmanuel was on his way to Apollo hospital in New Delhi, India. He had been searching for a hospital that would perform a delicate operation to remove the parathyroid gland. After sending requests to numerous hospitals, many of them declined because of his fragile nature and the complications that could result from the operation. Apollo Hospital in New Delhi accepted his request but declined to do the bracing because of how his back was and the fact that his bones were very brittle.

"I got complications the first day I got admitted in the hospital," explained Emmanuel. "Surely, the doctors in Nairobi knew about the urgency of my condition. It was a scary moment for the entire family as the doctors candidly briefed us about the risks of the operation I was about to go through. The process was called parathyroidectomy – basically a surgery to remove the parathyroid glands. The parathyroid glands are right behind the thyroid glands in the neck. These glands help the body control the calcium level in the blood."

Emmanuel continued, "The surgeon informed us that the success/failure rate of the process could be put at 50-50."

Parathyroidectomy is a simple surgery but my physical state was the problem. They were afraid that my small chest, which had caused



*Emmanuel (after his 14th Surgery), and  
Dr. Stephen Kimotho (the author)*

changes to my internal systems, could cause complications particularly related to extraction of carbon dioxide upon from the body.

"I was, however, thoroughly counselled and prepared, and despite the challenges ahead, they were ready to take the risk. The operation was done and it was successful, despite the anticipated challenges.

I had extremely low oxygen levels and had to remain in the Critical Care Unit (CCU) for two weeks as they did some complex procedures to curb the carbon dioxide and tame some bouts of high fever that were attacking me.

My mum had accompanied me; she was surely disturbed by what was going on, but despite all the challenges, we continued to pray for divine intervention. Fortunately, I responded well to treatment. This operation really helped a lot despite the intensive use of medication. I was on 24 tablets a day, but it didn't bother me much. I was used to it.

Soon, I was on my way back to Kenya, to the joy of many family members and friends. But unknown to us, my family had additional tribulations on the way, as shortly after, my dad's health a turn for the worse. It was really a depressing time for our family."

## From Bad to Worse

"Life can be trying sometimes, my friend," said Emmanuel one day in a rather sad tone that caught my attention. I knew the family was going through a lot of hardships, but I dreaded anything that could make things worse than they were. "What is it bro?" I asked, alarmed.

"You know, recently...", Emmanuel began in a low voice, "dad has been unwell."

"Yaeh, I remember your mum mentioning about it and I am sorry about that," I replied.

Emmanuel's dad had been going through a lot during that period. His body had grown weak and he looked stressed. He was stressed partly because of his son Emmanuel. He was pretty disappointed by the outcome of the three failed kidney transplants on Emmanuel. But the most disturbing issue was the depressing news he had received about his own health. His remaining kidney was weakening fast as a result of frequent ailments and doctors were afraid they would have to put him on dialysis soon if the situation did not improve.

"My dad started attending dialysis sessions," Emmanuel intimated pensively. "Let me tell you, at home everyone was sad. We were sad because we all understood what that meant. My dad understood my condition perfectly well. He understood the hassles of going through the dialysis process in Kenya, but he could do nothing. We felt like cornered chicken in the face of adversity, but we still took courage from the fact that God was on our side."

According to Emmanuel's mum, the developments concerning his health, and stress about Emmanuel, had really taken a toll on him. At some point he was even in denial. Everyone except him could see that he had changed.

"His condition was getting worse by the day. Perhaps he couldn't bring himself to accept the challenges of going through what I had gone through for the past 14 years," said Emmanuel. "We had to call in our spiritual guide (Fr. Joseph Warugano) to intervene, and it was thereafter that he accepted to start attending dialysis sessions at Kenyatta."

"I remember one day receiving one of those calls that no one would want to receive, especially if they concern one's father. The caller had packaged his message succinctly— Your dad has to go through a special procedure to implant a catheter below his neck.' It was urgent. We had no option but to give consent," said a pensive looking Mumo.

The key way to deal with kidney disease, just like other chronic diseases, is to accept- come to terms with it. To accept the reality of the condition gives one a lot of peace. Emmanuel really prayed for his father to accept his condition, and so did the rest of the family. They would talk to God to help the father of the family to accept his condition and to take it as a 'cross'.

Dialysis is very involving. It changes an individual's life completely. Emmanuel says, "Nowadays, my dad is in Kenyatta Referral Hospital for the better part of the week. At Kenyatta Hospital, the demand for dialysis services outweighs the capacity of the hospital to provide it. The booking list for those competing for the few dialyzers is always long and you have to be patient. In a week he rests like for two days. But we encourage him every day. The financial implications of dialysis are also very stressful." But then, things started getting from bad to worse.

## **The Darkest Day in the Family's History**

Sunday, 19 July 2015 will forever remain etched in the minds of the Gitaus. It was a fairly cold and gloomy day, as if foreboding the eminent tragedy, they were about to experience. Emmanuel had requested me to accompany him to the hospital to see his dad that day. We agreed to set off for the hospital at 11am after attending what he loved most: Holy Mass. I had for some moment toyed with the idea of persuading Emmanuel to bring the visit forward to 8am the same day, but that would have meant him skipping the Holy Mass, something he rarely did. On that ground, I let go the idea and settled for 11 am.

I arrived at Emmanuel's place at 10:50 am or thereabouts. As I parked outside Emmanuel's house, a lot of things crossed my mind. I thought about Emmanuel's kidney condition. The young man was already going through a lot, both physically and psychologically. On top



of that, the family now had to contend with the sickness of his dad. The family was going through hell. But like Emmanuel, they held steadfastly to their faith in God that things would change for better someday.

As I knocked, I took some time to study the huge kitchen that Emmanuel had constructed outside his house. He was a professional caterer and he engaged people to prepare cookies and crisps for sale.

The young man believed in working for his own money. I remembered one day when he told me: "My brother, I hate begging. I pray to God to give me some strength to toil and earn something for myself. My body may be crippled by this disease," he said looking at himself for a moment and smiling. "Sometimes I think I look interesting," he bursts into more laughter. "But anyway, I pray to God not to have my mind crippled too. I belong to God and fully submit to Him. As long as I can think straight, I will do something to earn my living rather than beg for assistance."

Then the door finally opened and a young lady appeared (she was one of the volunteers in Emmanuel's crisps business, working alongside other casual employees, but often remained behind to help Emmanuel with house chores). She immediately recognized me and informed me that Emmanuel was on his way from church. The church was about a kilometre from Emmanuel's house; therefore, I knew he won't take long.

A few minutes later, Emmanuel came. One look at him told me that he wasn't happy. His father's illness was taking a toll on him. He greeted me and thanked me for coming to pick him up and as he was about to tell me about his dad, a call came through.

It was his sister calling from the hospital. Suddenly, Emmanuel's face changed. He moved slowly to the sofa and heaved himself on the sit with a kind of resignation that scared me for a moment. Throughout his conversation with the caller, he remained calm and controlled his tone. His face grew darker as the conversation continued. Meanwhile, I was preparing for the worst. After a short while, he put the phone down, looked at me and said sombrely, "Mzee (my dad) is gone! What do we say? Let God do His will."



I took a moment to console him with all the verses I could remember from the Bible and some anecdotes from our culture, but still felt I was not doing enough. He occasionally looked up on the ceiling of his house, as if searching for the right words, but all he could mumble was, "It's God's doing. What do we say?" This was one of the saddest days in Emmanuel's life.

After a while, Emmanuel called the priest at the church and informed him of the sad news. He further requested him to ask the choir members and other followers who had planned to visit the family that morning to pray for the family and to wait for him at the church compound instead. Shortly, we got into my car and headed for the church compound.

Upon reaching the church compound, we found a small crowd of sad congregants waiting for Emmanuel. The news had spread and a melancholic mood engulfed the compound. We silently joined them. The priest could read the heaviness of emotions in the air and did not spend



*Emmanuel reacts after his father's death.*

a lot of time on niceties. He led the congregants in a series of prayers and recitations from the Roman Catholic faith.

As we prayed, the weaver birds in the background chanted happily at the clear skies, perhaps thanking their Creator for His grace, but totally oblivious of the sadness hovering on the humans below them. Soon, a number of us set off for the hospital to join the other family members. Throughout the journey, which took us across the

city of Nairobi, Emmanuel didn't say much, and understandably so. I knew the news had devastated him. Upon reaching the hospital, we found Emmanuel's mother, his sister Eunice, his uncle from Kasarani and a few other relatives in small groups talking in hushed tones.

We greeted them and after some time they decided that they would love to see the body of the late Gitau. This was the most difficult moment for all the members of this family. It was equally difficult for me. We silently trudged towards the preservation room, each overwhelmed with grief, and thoughts that we could not share then, hovered freely in our minds.

The attendant casually opened the room and gave way for the family members to get in. I looked at his face, searching for any hint of emotions and saw none. His feelings must have been seared by frequent exposure to morbid circumstances. The sense of loss and grief was palpable. You could feel it in the air. Very little was said.

One gentleman (a relative of the late Gitau family) must have studied the moment and realized that everyone was numb with emotions, and decided to take leadership of the situation. I will never forget the courage of this gentleman in such an overwhelming situation. As it turned out, he was a devoted Catholic, and soon led us into prayers. We prayed intensely for nearly half an hour. I occasionally threw quick glances at Emmanuel and other family members during the prayer session and their faces told it all. It must have been one of the worst moments in their lives. However, they exercised restraint and prayed. I didn't see tears on Emmanuel's, his mum's, or sister's eyes then, but I knew their hearts were sobbing. They seemed to have understood the power of prayers and constantly drew their strength from God. They really prayed.

Shortly, the priest joined us and asked us to take the family home and meet there with the rest of the friends and relatives who had come to mourn with the family. The priest must have noted that the turn of events was having a heavy toll on Emmanuel. So he called him aside and later drove him out for lunch and a counselling session.

Organizing the burial of Emmanuel's father was another unanticipated hurdle for the family. The hospital management had flatly rejected any suggestion of releasing Mr. Gitau's body for a more descent preservation in the morgue, until the outstanding bill was completely settled. The bill of more than Ksh1.8 million (\$18,000) was more than the family could handle. But despite the challenges, the extended family members and friends raised the whole amount and Mr. Gitau was decently laid to rest. It was truly God's doing.

## **Emmanuel Finally Talks About His Dad's Death.**

For several months, Emmanuel said very little about his dad's death to me. I knew how deeply he loved his dad. I couldn't help but imagine what he was going through. Then, one day, he decided to open up to me about what he was going through using a chat platform called WhatsApp:

Greetings my bro. It is my prayer you and your family are blessed. It has been a while since we talked. How is the going? Just decided to write to you briefly.

I didn't tell you much about my dad, but I can say that he was a great pillar in our lives. He uplifted our spiritual and social lives. He loved education and always emphasized it. He cared about our physical wellbeing, too. For example, I have been unwell for a long time but he never left me, not even once. He loved me. Even when he was unwell, he thought of me first and that always amazed me. He was our source of inspiration. He checked on us emotionally and socially until his last day.

Despite dad being an inspiration to us all, he was tough and steadfast in his decisions. Sometimes I would think his position on issues was too much for me... but when I look back, I see the importance of those decisions. Today we reap the fruits of his wise decisions.

We miss him a lot. Every time I think of him, I know I have someone who is praying for me in heaven, for he knows better while in heaven what we go through as his children. I believe life will be better than before.

I remember his stories. Stories of some families that had decided that they would never baptize their children "Emmanuel." The name Emmanuel had come to be associated with sorrow and suffering. When they see me, they see sorrow and suffering.

But with the support of my dad and my family, I have learnt to ignore such people and laugh at their folly. I know many of my friends who bear the name Emmanuel and they are okay. We all face challenges, but I believe if we could persevere, we shall become saints in the life to come.

My credit goes to many people who have supported me financially, spiritually and emotionally, especially Ambutu a Maria wa Mukuyu-ini, our church fraternity, as well as family and friends. I will forever be indebted to Lions Hospital. I give them credit through their former chairman Ndegwa and manager Datoo, who supported me with dialysis items and subsidized dialysis fees for me, and eventually offered the service to me for free for two years – in total, almost eight years of assistance since I met them. Only God can reward their kindness.

My gratitude also goes to K.K. Shah Laboratories who have been doing tests worth over Ksh10,000 (\$100) for free every week after the 2013 parathyroid operation. It is truly God's doing, for His graces and mercies are endless.

# Chapter 9

## Life Goes on

*I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'*  
—Ezekiel 37.6

### When They Walk Away from You

Families that have terminally ill patients go through a lot of social tribulations too. Good friends will forsake you and start regarding you as a bother. While some may openly reject and isolate people suffering from chronic kidney failure, many may not show such rejection openly. Surprisingly, Emmanuel's family seems to have lost very few friends; if anything, they got many new ones and they attribute this to Emmanuel's ability to socialize and make new friends. As I talked to Emmanuel's father, it was evident that extended family members and friends provided a lot of the much-needed social support in Emmanuel's life.

Emmanuel's family had conducted a few fundraisers for Emmanuel's medical support. The family had nothing but praises for the friends and family members who had always stood by them.

Emmanuel attributes the generosity of the friends to God's favour. One day he wrote to me:

My bro, God is able and does good things for those who follow His statutes. I say this because of some things that have happened to me when I was ill and struggling in India. We had many challenges in India. At one time, things were so tight. I could tell that my dad, who had accompanied me, had reached his limits. Overtime, he started getting frustrated too. We had been in India for months and our kitty had run out. I didn't know what to do, but I knew I had to do something. I remember praying fervently to God to grant me His favour.

## Emmanuel had a Girlfriend

*Love knows no reason, no boundaries, no distance. It has a sole intention of bringing people together.*

— **Unknown**

"As one writer put it, 'The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart.' Like everyone else, I also have feelings. Everyone loves to be loved and to love: and I loved this girl, Stella. She was gorgeous and warm. Her kindness complemented her physical beauty. She had a heart of gold: kind and warm. She loved me and I loved her very much, and my desire was to love her to the end of time. Our love was strong and I prayed it would remain that way forever.

"I met Stella in one of those places where you would never expect love to sprout: The renal hospital ward. I was there as a renal patient, but she was there for her mother who was also a renal patient. But when you meet someone who is able to look beyond your weakness, someone who loves you for who you are rather than what you have; when you meet someone and your heart tells you that you would want to spend the rest of your life with that person, then, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible. And that is how our journey of love started.

"Stella was an awesome lady. The kind of a child every mother would love to have. She loved her mother so much and she stayed by her side most of the four hours of dialysis, comforting and taking care of her. As we got to share more and more of our experiences and encourage one another, we got more and more deeply in love with each other. But two years later, tragedy struck and Stella's mother passed on.

"The death of Stella's mother was the most depressing moment of her life. She cried a lot, not only from the agony of the loss, but also because of how her dear mum died. Stella's mum died a slow, painful death. I disregarded my own problems and did my best to console and comfort her. That is what love is: Walking together through the valley of grief and standing with your loved ones in such times of sorrow.

"My acts of kindness and care perhaps brought down the remaining curtains of love. Stella came to trust me and long for my company, too. I loved her too and loved her company as well. She was a kind and sociable person.

"Our journey of love continued for three sometimes bumpy and rough years. But I am ever grateful to have been genuinely loved and having an opportunity to truly love. A lot of things were happening in our lives that made our relationship very hard to sustain. It was hard to let go of someone I loved so much. But it happened. I am sure it wasn't easy for her either."

## Chapter 10

### Holding on: Hope that Lasts

*Resilience means facing life's difficulties with courage and patience – refusing to give up. The quality of character that allows a person rebound from misfortune, hardships and traumas. It is rooted in a persistent determination of spirit — a determination to embrace all that makes life worth living even in the face of overwhelming odds. When we have a clear sense of identity and purpose, we are more resilient, because we can hold fast to our vision of a better future.*

**—Wisdom commons**

Borrowing from Steve Goodie, one of the prolific creative writers of our times, I feel like every scar on Emmanuel's body after going through 14 operations reminds him that, he did indeed survive his deepest wounds. That in itself is an accomplishment. Those scars bring to mind something else too: that the damage life has inflicted on him has, in many cases, left him stronger and more resilient. What hurt him in the past has actually made him better equipped to face his present.

Emmanuel's life has drastically changed the way I look at my own. Though there have been many obstacles in Emmanuel's life, many of them emanating from his health condition, he does not sit down to pity himself, but instead focuses his energy on activities that he is passionate about such as catering. He has taught me deep lessons on patience, perseverance and hope. He has taught me invaluable lessons on looking beyond every day's frustrations and hardships of life. I believe what he always tells me, that God had a reason and a purpose of why we met.

Emmanuel knows the secret of a happy life. He knows that the people we interact with sometimes insidiously influence who we are, how we are, or what we believe in. The people you surround yourself with in life have a significant influence on various aspects of your life. This is a fact that Emmanuel understands only too well; thus, he is very careful about the people he brings into his life and how he treats them.



Emmanuel believes in the power of friendship. Friends and family relations mean a lot in his life. Emmanuel is extremely lucky to have amazing family members who have always supported him throughout his life. He tells me that the secret to a happy life is to appreciate and love your family and friends, and to appreciate every little act of kindness. "Friends are very important and they are a real facet of my everyday life. My family and friends have and continue to have a truly significant, positive impact on my life," Emmanuel observes. In the following section, I cite a few tributes by friends.

One thing that always puzzles many people about Emmanuel is his resilience and steadfast faith in God. Even when life looked so grim, that flickering faith still glittered in him. Sometimes, I feel like life has literally walked Emmanuel through a damning valley of asperities, and delivered him to the gates of despair. But he has refused to give up. Instead, he bounces back — whether limping or on crutches, more inspired and hopeful about his future. He never misses an opportunity to pick the incredible lessons of life that are often learned in the valley of adversity. I remember, in particular, one WhatsApp chat he sent to me; it says everything I would have wanted to say:

I always say that we let God's will be done. But often, some of my friends tell me that I should try and change that statement, particularly when I write it on my Facebook page. They associate the statement with giving up and say that might lead to an early death. But for me, the statement is a great source of strength.

Every day when I remember my dad in the operation room waiting to donate his own kidney to me, I get my strength renewed. He loved me that much, he lay there for me. He donated his kidney to me. The operation was not successful, and the donated kidney failed. My dad never complained; he accepted God's will for us.

Throughout my life, I have never given up and I am not about to. I have always believed that I will be healed one day. The nurses at KNH can attest to this in spite of their doubts, based on their medical knowledge. If it wasn't for acceptance and

submission to God's holy will, then, I would, perhaps, have died a long time ago from depression, or even committed suicide like many who have found themselves with similar challenges, have done.

Of late, my body has become disfigured. The current deformity has left me with mini multiple fractures which are very painful, to say the least. I cannot do many things that I loved to do. I cannot walk for long; I can't run or ride a bicycle; I can't swim; I can't dance; I have to support myself when taking a seat, or standing up from that seat; I can't travel for long because I would either get breathless, fatigued or suffer from pains. The list is long, but I thank God because I can do three things: I can pray, I can thank Him, and I can praise Him. That is all that matters to me now.

I always implore the youth to give thanks to God for the many things they can do. Sometime we take the small things we are able to do or experience with ease (like going for a short call of nature) for granted and we forget that there are many out there who can't manage to do them.

Tell me, if God is not the one who made this possible, who did? The devil doesn't come to help: he comes to destroy. I have lived in my current condition for 14 years. It is nothing but the will of God, His favour, mercy and grace that have brought me this far. Bro, I would have written more, for I feel sleepless tonight, but my back pains; therefore, let me pen off. It is 11:00pm. God Bless you.

Three days after the funeral of his father, Emmanuel was taken ill. He had some inexplicable internal bleeding. He passed blood with stool and his nose too bled a lot and this scared everyone in the family. By the time he was admitted he had lost a lot of blood. Friends and relatives donated a lot of blood, and with time his condition stabilized. Emmanuel never tires to thank his friends, as he once expressed to me:

My bro, how happy I am to have valuable friends like you who are concerned about the lives of the sick or needy. I remember the time I was a student at Kenya Poly, my colleagues liked taking porridge especially

during the cold weather. Later they would complain that the porridge made them visit the washrooms very often. I could hardly comprehend how that was indeed something to complain about. They perhaps were ignorant of the fact that I had to miss classes twice every week and pay to have the urea removed from my body by machines through a process called dialysis. They themselves, didn't need to pay money or experience the discomfort of dialysis to relieve their bodies of urea. Sadly, they didn't regard their position of health as anything to thank God for.

But when they came to know of my condition, and that I was not as privileged as they to visit the gents and answer a short call of nature, they were astonished. They stopped complaining and glorified God for the many small graces that they ignored. They also started prayer meetings during lunch hour after noticing my attachment to Holy Mass. I used to go for the Holy Mass every day. I drew my strength from prayers. I never used to go for lunch sometimes. My food was the Eucharist.

Emmanuel's illness has shaped the lives and experiences of his family members in different ways. Mumo, in retrospect, believes that the experiences that the family had gone through have made him appreciate life and people in general. He has learnt that if we love someone we can go to any length to help them when they are in problems. "Emmanuel has always challenged me in many ways. His optimism in life is one to be emulated by many. He longs for the day his business will stabilize and see him become a manager of his own business. Support of friends is vital. This support need not be monetary but also social support," Observed Mumo.

## **They Wait for My End**

Emmanuel is constantly aware of people who have waited for his demise and to them, he says:

"Sometimes I am frail, too weak to whisper,  
I look like nothing but misery,  
but life within me abounds.  
At times people hold their breath;  
they wait to see my end; they wait for my death,

but I know my end is not in death.  
I remember one professor in Kenya who was  
unable to comprehend how I survived. He said:  
'Emmanuel, I would like to see your end.'  
He is bound to tarry a little longer, that is,  
if his end does not come before mine, because He who lives in  
me is stronger than my adversaries;  
Jesus Christ lives in me,  
My adversaries have to live with that fact or leave."

## **It Will Take More Than Sympathy**

At the age of 38, Emmanuel has been through the treacherous hills and scaring valleys of life. What amazes me is his steadfast love. He has been featured in a number of local radio stations and televisions. He loves telling his story. He loves to have his story used to encourage others who may be going through the rough terrains of life. He accepts and lives the best of what life presents, as can be attested by one of the recent chats he sent to me:

Hey bro. Well, despite going through painful episodes of life, I will still trust in God who is the author of my life and the one who sustains me. Sometimes life is so hard for me that I can hardly take a shower, something I have always loved doing. But I thank God for surrounding me with gracious siblings who go out of the way to help me out with rather personal stuff.

I know I had mentioned Eunice previously, but Maryann, my younger sister, has been a miracle too in my life. God bless you MaryAnn, Hannah and my little bro Michael.

Of late, I can't sit for long because of my weak bones, so I lie down on the coach for long. I have to stand up occasionally to stretch. I alternate the two, and this has become my new lifestyle, bro. But as I said to you, our Lord is good all the time regardless of our situation. He, the Lord, knows why all these things are happening to me and obviously, He has a good and specific reason. He reminds me that gold has to pass

through fire to be refined. All in all, I am happy in the Lord. Job said, "God injures and He heals at His own convenient time."

For me, it might sound like forever because I have been in this condition for 18 years now. You will agree with me that this is a long time to live without both kidneys, going for dialysis twice, and sometimes thrice a week, and taking prescription drugs after prescription drugs. But through His mercy and grace, God has filled me with amazing perseverance, patience and humility. These three are impossible without God in my situation.

My brother, I do strongly believe that one day all this will come to an end because God is forever merciful and my late dad prays for his children up there in eternal glory.

God's divine presence replenishes my faith every day as I receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament. By the way, I have means of transport to the Mass now. I attend the Holy Mass every day like before. I am sorted spiritually.

While eating grapes, you will find that some are bitter and others sweet. The same with life: There are some pretty good times and low times when sufferings abound. Never ever give up; just trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the intercession of Beloved Mother Mary, angels and the saints.

As one walks away from the hospital bed where Emmanuel goes through dialysis, it is hard to ignore the sharp beep from the dialyser that cuts through the room intermittently, leaving a distant trail of echoes in the head. Every day, Emmanuel hopes that more people would understand that it would take more than sympathy to keep this dialyser beep going on.

**May God bless you for  
taking time to read  
this story.**

**End**

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## About the book

Emmanuel has gone through three kidney transplants and they all failed. Besides having been on dialysis from 2002, Emmanuel had gone through at least 14 major operations in both Kenya and India. One day after a string of medical tests, the doctor delivered the worst news to Emmanuel: he had less than three months to live.

This book presents a unique account of Emmanuel's lived experiences detailing his moments of joy, fear, hope, tribulations, and perseverance. The book goes beyond mere capturing of the physical and emotional anguish that many renal patients go through, but also illustrates the importance of family love to renal patients, reassurances and unwavering faith and trust in God at all situations.

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