



## CHAPTER ONE

# BORN A MISTAKE

It is said that a child's first years are particularly important to their wellbeing because it is the foundation phase of one's life. These years are crucial to your child's physical and cognitive development. Unfortunately, most of my childhood years were filled with so much rejection, sadness, pain, and tears. I was reminded of the mistake I was and that I should never have been born. Reminded of what a burden my existence was. Rejection, sadness, pain, and tears became my companions for most of my life. There is a reason why I mention the physical and cognitive development phase, as these attributes play a huge role in who "Natasha" later became. When we become older and start questioning why we are a certain way, it is always best to go back to the root of our problems; the beginning, and start from there. For me, the beginning goes to a time even before I was born. Possibly to the time I was in my mother's womb.

I was born in Johannesburg in a town called Lenasia. In the early hours of Sunday on a "Mother's Day" I made my entrance to this earth. Not that I was a Mother's Day gift to my mother. Rather another

burden for her to care for. I am the second eldest child, born to a mother who, at the time, was practically a child herself. My mother had my brother Deon when she was 16 years old, and me when she was still at the tender age of 17. Her life was also an incredibly sad and painful one and she also did not have a good childhood. Growing up in extreme poverty, my mother thought that getting married was her only option for a better life. All she ever wanted was for someone to take care of her and love her. To her dismay it didn't quite pan out the way she had hoped it would.

My father left when I was two months old and my brother was only a year older. My mother was suddenly a single mother of two. When my mother found out that she was pregnant with me she was devastated because she was only 16 years old at the time, battling to look after herself and a new-born baby. She then went to the doctor in an attempt to abort me. The doctor had given her some medication to take to complete the process and she did take it. She waited but nothing happened. It seems that this mistake, which was me, was destined to be born. Another child to look after, another mouth to feed. My mother had to share my brother's nappies with me and battled to breast feed me as she did not have enough milk in her breasts for me and she could not afford to buy milk formula.

After my father left her, she went back to live with her mother and siblings in a 2-bedroom home. The house comprised of a small kitchen, lounge, two bedrooms and a toilet behind the house. My mother, grandmother, brother, and I shared one room. My mother's younger sister, her husband and their two children who came later shared the other room, while my mother's brother slept in the lounge. Her other brother was already married and living in his own house.

During the midst of all of this, my mother started developing blotches of white spots all over her body, a condition called vitiligo. This is a disease that causes the loss of skin pigmentation. She was already battling with feelings of rejection, but now started developing a

low self-esteem as well. Her skin condition started stirring negative emotions in herself, feeding into her rejection issues. She felt that she had to try harder to receive love from the opposite sex. Thinking about it now, I realise that may have been part of the reason my father left. She was so conscious of the changes to her skin that she forgot how beautiful she was. She so yearned to be loved and accepted that she made a lot of wrong choices when it came to choosing the right partner. She moved on in pursuit of finding happiness, but to her dismay never found the love she yearned for. It is because of the mistakes she made, that I eventually learned so much in my life.

Four years later my mother went on to have another child after me, my sister Nantika. Her father was a very abusive man and he would beat my mother so badly. One of my earliest and most painful memories as a child was when I was about 4 years old. My mother was getting one of her regular beatings, I started crying for her, when “this man” turned around and beat me that my face was so swollen, and my mouth was twice the size. I wet myself from fear and my punishment for this was to sit in the corner until I cried myself to sleep, while wetting myself in the process. No Child should experience such trauma at such an early age or undergo physically abused like that. The fear that was being instilled in me as a little child would later start manifesting in other forms when I got older.

My mother left me to stay with my grandmother to protect me from the beatings that she used to get. I remember my granny telling me, on a certain occasion when my mother brought me back, my face was disfigured. However, in my mother’s absence I was abused in many ways by family members. I remember the beatings ‘abuse’ while I continuously cried for my mother, oh how I missed her, how I longed for her to just hold me, or just to hear her voice. How I yearned for my mother’s love! She would visit every so often at my grandmother’s house but never stayed for too long, because she and her siblings never got on very well, and she had her own problems to deal with.

Later it dawned on me that I was, in fact, an orphan. My father was never there, he did not even try to visit his children. My mother went on her own pursuit of happiness and stability, battling to find herself. Life had given her a raw deal, and it was only much later in her life when she found a relationship with Jesus did she actually find real peace, and a sense of belonging. In the interim her two children were left to learn to survive with whatever was thrown in their path

I remember being five years old and having to wash and dress myself before taking a walk, on my own, to preschool. I loved drawing pictures of girls in beautiful dresses, so whatever scrap piece of paper I could find, I would draw. As I drew these pictures, I would imagine beautiful fairy tales in my head. I allowed my imagination to run wild as this was my way of escaping the pain that I endured.

They say no matter how hard you try to run from bad things in your past, they have a way of catching up to you. "What you resist shall persist." The only way to truly be free from any problem, is to accept it for what it is, and learn to forgive. One of my most traumatising experiences is one which I had tried to suppress for many years, but I eventually had to confront it in order to be free. When I was 8 years old, I was raped by an uncle in the family. I was playing with my friends next door and we were having so much fun, I was so happy and carefree. We were playing with our dolls pretending to be mothers. We had such childlike innocence. I decided to go home to fetch a doll. At the time no one was at home, besides my uncle. He called me to the room, and me being the young and obedient child that I was, I went, not knowing that he would violate my innocence. When he was done, I was filled with so much shame and still shaking that I did not know what to do. I remember changing the shorts that I had on because I felt dirty. I ran to the neighbours and waited till my mother and aunt came home. Within minutes that innocent, carefree little girl was gone for ever. When I went home, I was consumed with fear, shame, and guilt. I thought that somehow, I was at fault for what happened to me. I felt as if it were my fault that a grown

man, who should have known that what he was doing was sick and wrong, decided to do it anyway. He decided to violate my small and defenceless body. For many years I lived with the feeling that I was damaged goods. I felt worthless. Although I tried to bury the incident deep in my mind, my dreams always seemed to remind me. Living in an Indian community, people did not address such matters. They buried such 'shame' so deep, that if it was ever brought out, people would look at the girl or the woman as if she was a piece of damage goods. As the years progressed, I realised that I was the victim and that there was nothing that I should be ashamed about. I also came to the realisation that it was because of that traumatic experience that I adopted the attitude of standing up for myself, irrespective of how people saw me. As a defence mechanism I learned to protect myself by my using my words as a weapon. My mouthpiece simultaneously became my biggest strength and weakness. I learned that with my words I could build people up, but just as easily break people down in the name of protecting myself.

I was brought up in a Christian home and attended Sunday school from the age of four. I learnt about God through Bible stories taught to us during Sunday school. It is also where I was taught that if you want to talk to God, you must kneel and hold your hands together and pray. I learned that prayer is a conversation between myself and God, and that I can speak to Him about anything that is on my heart.

I would pray every night before I slept, and in the morning after I got up. I started asking God many questions from an early age. Why was I born in a home without a mother and a father? Why don't you answer my prayers? God where are you when I am being beaten? Why? Why? Why? I was always an inquisitive little girl asking a lot of questions, and if I was not satisfied with the answers then I would ask more questions.

I was a very talkative child, and in grade 3 I was dubbed Miss Chatterbox by my teacher

Mrs Samuels. That name followed me throughout my schooling career. I loved reading books right from when I was able to read. I remember walking to the library as a little girl. As I perused all the books on the shelves, I would get so excited and could not wait to get home to read the ones I had chosen. My imagination would take over once again as I read, absorbing all the words of the story, and forming a play in my head. I loved living in my own imagination, it was where I would escape from whatever bad situation I endured, by dreaming my own beautiful stories. This was my sense of freedom where only I was in control of how the story ended.