

Beautifully Flawed

DR. ARINOLA ARABA

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BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED

FROM:

TO:

DATE:

MESSAGE:

DEDICATION

To my children: especially Dami – La Vogue, (my fashion consultant), Bobbee (Mr. Handsome, the most generous young man I know), Ayo (my precious Your Royal Highness), who are my most prized gifts in life. May you grow in grace and live unashamedly for the faith! You have taught me so much about perseverance and been so much joy to parent. My thanks to the children's father for all he taught the children and me – blessings to him and his new family.

To my long-suffering mum, Folake Araba; also, Oyin, Jumoke, Yinka with whom growing up was an adventure, and still is, after daddy's passing!

SOME UK STATISTICS

“An estimated 1.9 million adults aged 16 to 59 experienced domestic abuse in the last year. Two women each week and one man each month are killed in England and Wales by a current or former partner. Domestic abuse is a hugely destructive problem and we have a collective responsibility to tackle it”

One in four women and one in six men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime and domestic abuse costs businesses £1.9 billion every year due to decreased productivity, time off work, lost wages and sick pay. In the UK, nearly 2 million people experienced domestic abuse in the last year alone.

With one third of a working adult’s life spent in work, charities and not for profit organisations can create a supportive workplace culture that encourages the identification of health and well-being needs and to help break the silence around this issue. Our draft policy also takes into account the needs of volunteers and how they can also be supported if they are affected by domestic abuse.

Source: accessed 25/02/19

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2017>



My self-esteem was at such an all-time low, I used to wear men's clothes!

Disclaimer: PLEASE NOTE that I do not advocate divorce or separation and this book is not advisable for any particular person or situation. It is just my own story to encourage you, the reader, of God's powerful ability to turn the mess of our lives into a beautiful message. Marriages end for a variety of reasons which may not involve domestic abuse/violence. Always seek help PLEASE, as no situation is the same.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and last and always, thank you to Grace, God-my Daddy,
without whom I would have completely lost my mind!

There are so many people who have helped me in the journey of
life and it is almost impossible to mention them all.

Thank you to friends who make my life richer:
Madam Mayor Sanchia Alasia, sitting civic Mayor of Barking and
Dagenham, UK 2018/19, who will put herself out on a limb to
help anyone,
Bose Felix, a true friend in need,
Sexy Mala Alina who goes beyond the call of duty for me,
Hannah Kupoluyi who makes time to listen even when she has
little time for herself,
Nadier Lawson and Lynda Sigauke who would always make
time to pray with me,
Komal, YRH, forever loyal and just there for me,
Mamusu Komon who will always find time for a chat
Wumi Oyewole, my cuz, who is always looking for
opportunities for me!
Molly for embedding the idea to put my story in a book!
Olayinka Cline-Thomas who selflessly stayed up at night to
proofread my book,
To Daura G London for the picture inside of the back cover
To Pst Tunji Olujimi for the beautiful book cover!

My church family, Hillsong, who unknowingly and lovingly have
helped shape the lives and character of the children and I.
The father of the children for the part he plays in their lives.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Is this book all about me?

Yes, it is... except where I have added my daughter's experiences
following the break-up.

In life, we all make mistakes but it takes a good, kind and loving
God to give one grace to make the best of life, by turning our
mess into a message, with a miracle. I decided to document my
experience, after being so shy about it because I have seen the
look of shock on so many people's faces when they get to hear I
was once in a situation where I felt so powerless and voiceless.

Going solo or single is not always the best when it involves
children but you learn to develop and sharpen many life skills, not
the least of which is balancing the book – "finance." I remember
the instances where I had to go without just to ensure the
children got the least of food, shelter and clothing! It has been all
worthwhile as I look back to see three beautiful young adults who
make me beam with pride all the time, even when I have to walk a
mile to meet them when they are stuck somewhere because they
lost their keys or needed money to get from A to B.

What is that word again? Resilience? Maybe I have learned a few
things about that too. And to you, my dear reader, thanks for
buying what I was so scared of sharing. I pray you find peace and
the grace to make your way in the world.

I have added some pages where I would like you to write down
your thoughts; after all you, the reader, matter!

Here dear reader, I invite you to consider what you would do in the various situations that I have faced. This is an opportunity to put yourself in my shoes... Feel free to make some notes about how you would have handled things differently, write your own story or even better write to me and tell me about it.

Contact me at: <http://arinola.com>

Enjoy

Quick Question: What do you hope to get out of this book?

RELATIONSHIPS

"Good relationships form the best foundation for a healthy society" copyright 2018 -Arinola Araba.

Here is an account of my own experience of being in a relationship that did not go so well. I feel I was a crucial party to the events that took place and I acknowledge the same in my writing. It was getting tiring, trying to rehash my story, so it seemed like a good idea to document my experience to help other people who may have gone through similar situations and experiences.

Local paper lady says, "I'm helpless" after being beaten by her husband!

The preceding words were seen in a dream I had the night before and formed the basis for my feeling the need to share very personal feelings with the reader as transparently as I can manage. I think DV (domestic violence/ domestic abuse) could be suffered by either gender and that is what makes it such a complex subject or argument which usually favours the female. Why would a human being blessed with intelligence, skill, "faculties", charm, know-how and every endowment needed to survive suddenly feel powerless at the hands of another individual?

Are we blaming the right party in a DV situation?

What about the "perpetrator," are they also victims of a 'condition' riddled with the inability to articulate their feelings or frustration? Or are they devoid of the skills to communicate with the other party?

I think we can agree, that by definition, DV is confined to the home or familiar setting otherwise bullying at work, for example, would come under the umbrella of DV.

You can imagine my shock at my behaviour when Hannah Kupoluyi of 'All Women's Network' (means what it says) asked me to speak at her women's conference last month about a Personal Finance Skills board game I created in 2015. I put it on the speaker stand and proceeded to talk about DV! Who talks about DV instead of money and budgeting skills? Me I suppose. It was a problem that I felt it was time to talk about and address promptly. No more hush or shhh...

Well, I could hear the break in my voice, so close to me crying as I began to recount some of the daily experiences of that time. I remember having to dial 000s on the phone after I had called a friend on it because I knew he would redial to see who I had been speaking to. I remember having to involve the DV helpline and being found out and threatened straight after. Also, my friend Bose called me once to ask me where her friend had gone. She said I used to laugh a lot, had fire in my eyes and full of life! What had happened to me? She wanted to know where the *real Arinola* had gone and really wanted 'her friend back,' she stressed. I think that got through to me in addition to my mum's tears and plea that this was not the life she had hoped I would be live.

As far as my dad was concerned, he wanted peace and if that meant taking time apart from the relationship that was the way to go! I refused to listen for a long time...why? Maybe I was hoping for some miraculous hit on the head for the ex to come to his senses. I remember his close friend pleading with me to do "something to shock" hubby into behaving well. What exactly does that mean? This friend claimed that I had lowered my self-esteem so much the man had little respect for me.

Isn't that what wives had to do to make their man feel less intimidated especially if the former had more life "achievements" than them? I think in my warped thoughts at the time, I was hoping for a day when 'he' would come to his senses. And me, didn't I need to come to mine too? This friend pleaded with me to think about the impact on my 3 then, under 5-year-old children. "Do it for them" they stressed almost vehemently. I am not sure how much sleep I had in those days as I would go over and over, in my head, again and again, the pros and cons of exiting the marriage.

What would the church say? What would my friends say or think? (At this time most of them had not seen or heard from me as they had been systematically cut off somehow). I constantly battled with the idea that I had failed and was a failure if I walked out.

A trial separation, the first chance of a way out, came in the form of an offer of accommodation in another area. It was an opportunity to start over, to flee violence. Guess what I did? I took back the form and told the officer that I didn't want their offer, and remember the look on their face – shock; considering that I had been relentless in seeking help, they could not understand why I had said no!

Fear.

How would I cope? With 3 children, the youngest still breastfeeding, how would I provide their basic needs without additional support? So! I went straight back to the same situation I was running from. And it only became worse. Because now, I was subject to more ridicule, taunts, more monitoring, hurtful comments, and increasing criticism. A little bit of jubilation about how I could never survive on my own and this became my belief for the next few months, until...

Another wake-up call. Not only was I the subject of torrents of verbally abusive language but I was now 'stupid' - because I had decided to embark on a Masters Degree course at a London university.

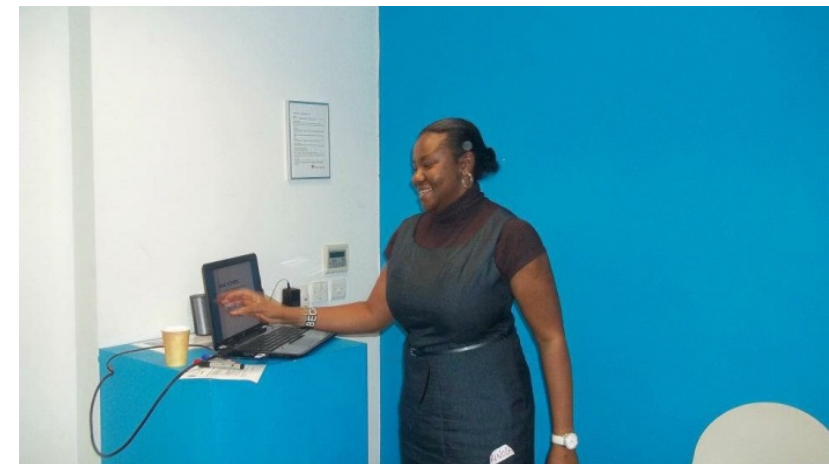
I remember being told I was not qualified or intelligent enough to get in on merit. I think something in me, with encouragement from a newly acquired friend, gave me the strength to push through with the application and to believe, to begin to dream again of what was possible.

Barbara was not only my hairdresser on a few occasions but a single mum who was coping well. So, it was possible to survive a sole parent existence then, I thought?

What kind of relationships do you have?

THINGS HAPPEN FOR A REASON...

Following many visits to hers, I found a safe place to express my fears and doubts. Only, the visits became quite regular and aroused suspicion so I'd have to make the excuse that my hair needed doing to go to hers. It was during a visit there; I was introduced to this other young lady who was studying 'medical informatics'. That had a nice ring to it and created an excitement in me. I don't think I slept much after this bit of news because it offered me some hope of a better future. So, there was a course I could go on, to get me out of the house?



I was speaking at a women's event

My excitement faded quickly when I got home and shared the news. I was reprimanded for even considering the course and told they would not take someone like me! What did that even mean? I had a first degree in a health discipline so why would I not qualify? The mind boggles...

"Wa pa mi" would echo in my head from time to time. It meant "you will kill me" in Yoruba, a native Nigerian (West African) language.

Usually said when someone was pleading that the beating stop or else they would be killed, just to make the aggressor stop. So, is it then difficult to understand that growing up in an environment like that it seemed normal to tolerate physical conversation rather than verbal?

Without divulging too much, there was a parental separation that spanned years, punctuated with bitterness and pain, denial of access to my mother for years. I think comments about me having more energy, drive and force in the way I got things done were probably a reflection of growing in a dominant male environment. But the constant criticism, anger at an estranged parent did little for my self-esteem and confidence. So, I think, despite a good educational background, I had little emotional maturity to handle adult relationships let alone romantic-like ones...I remember saying in conversation to an aunt, later, that my siblings were forming great relationships and subsequently getting married while I was pursuing higher academic accolades. We moved from the 'Barbara' area, with 2 children, to another home, only it was up north.

It did not get easier then, because I was soon isolated again with 'no friends'. But, I discovered another hairdresser, Rose. She was such a kind lady and I marvelled at her audacious nature. She ran a hairdressing salon with a few workers. She was talking to another customer about how she had to break free from 'his' interference. Her husband had been controlling, wanting to know her every move so they had to come to some arrangement. They no longer lived together and she was happier! What? And a Christian?

Is that even allowed?

Another single mum!

Why was I ever running into these types of women?

Not long after, I accidentally ran into a school friend who was shocked at how 'soft' and compliant I had become. She told she remembered how bold, strong and daring I had been back at school. She concluded that I was hiding something and behaving like an 'abused wife'! Alarm bells were going off in her head as I began to open to talk. She shared how her ex had run her into debt, beat her and then left. (I think). In any event, she had come to this area to start over. Oh no... not another woman who was managing on her own. Were all these encounters warning signs for me to heed so I could decide to choose 'safety'?

Where were my mum and dad in all this? They were far away because in my excitement to show that I didn't want interfering parents, they had been somehow cut off! They did not have a phone number for me – another story.

Anyway, I now had a hairdresser I could talk to and an old friend from university days, but I still needed good excuses to have access to seeing them. Rose once asked me why I put up with the verbal abuse directed at me, at home. I did not have a sane answer for such a soul-searching question and brushed it off somewhat. It, however, did not stop me thinking that maybe something was wrong with my thinking. In those days, I did not care how I looked or dressed and I was happy to wear 'his' tops and shirts and leave the house without cosmetic make up. Attending Church services was becoming more of a chore and served occasions to make and create excuses about so many "slips." Some more discerning people noticed things and asked questions about my appearance, my clothing and moods. Well, I got very good at avoiding conversation and would explain that I had to leave quickly to feed the children or some other convenient 'lame' excuse.

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Another lady who saw the 'signs' commented on how she had overheard a conversation at her workplace about a mother who talked sadly of how she was unable to contact her married daughter because she did not have a phone number or address for her. And after asking me what my maiden name was, she found it to be a match with this woman. We began to talk some more and I later found out that she had been relaying details of my after-church conversation to my mum!

How do you explain that kind of coincidence?

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What events do you think have happened for a reason?

WHAT WAS I THINKING...?

Toxic thoughts!

When you hear regularly you are no good, the power of those words begin to manifest as you 'meditate' on them. They rob you of taking a chance at opportunities that are presented to you, they mistake care from someone for 'they are trying to take advantage of me' syndrome. It causes mistrust in friendships, and ruins or tarnished relationships around you.

It becomes difficult to accept that you actually matter, that you belong to the world and are well-placed to make an impact and do something significant. It fuels fear! Fear of what...all sorts of fear.



An evening out

What I say now is, do it feeling the fear!

And when those voices in your head tell you, you are going nowhere and no one cares or loves you, answer back and say, “I am born to win. I am exquisitely and beautifully created and crafted.” Isn’t that liberating?

Pause for a second, please...

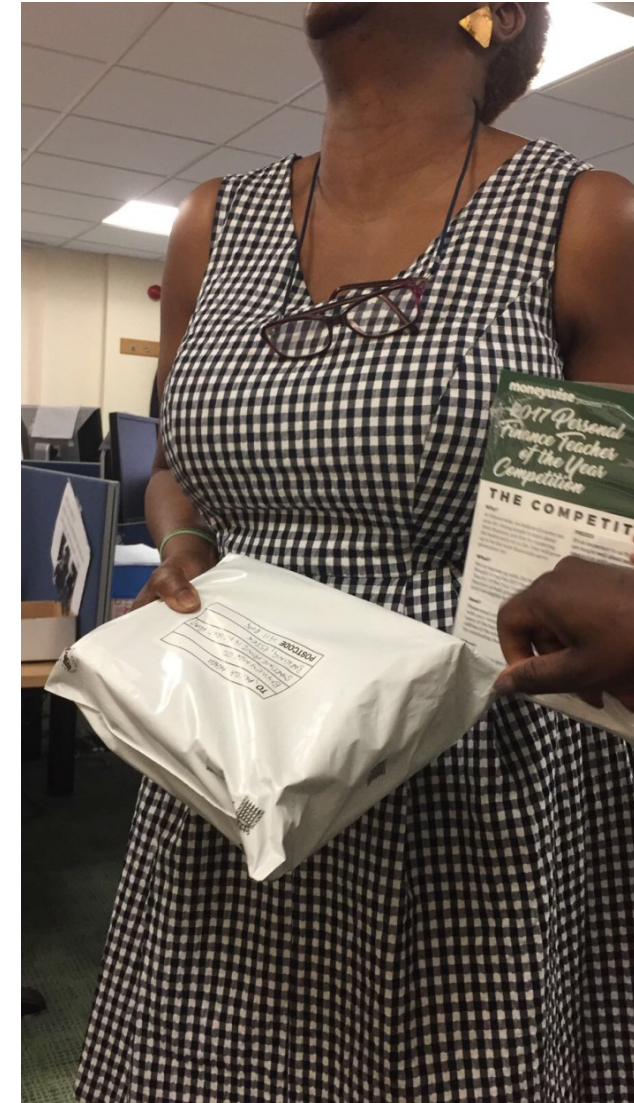
God is so close, closer than a whisper and His hands are always outstretched to receive us. Yes, when we grasp the enormity of God’s love, it changes us on the inside. It makes life worth living and gives us a strong sense of purpose.

Think about it!

What is the point in going to work to amass wealth and more wealth, debt upon debt, to prove a point? To Who? Who is even watching or scoring? The media, yes, maybe to ensure they have something to print. But seriously, why do some people seem to have nothing but trouble, day to day, time and again to emerge as a champion of a cause? Maybe we are all on a journey to do something significant.

How did I get out? I’m glad you ask.

Well after my self-immersed drama, the authorities were called into an ‘almost going nasty discussion’ at which point I knew I had to get out!



House of Commons package, UK (credit: Molly Okolonji)

As always, I either said or did something wrong. So there had to be some type of punishment to be inflicted as a warning or deterrent. There were more toxic thoughts and events at home!

Do you know how many times I told myself, "it's your fault" "you should behave better" or something like that? "Don't upset him" "just give in and do what he says" I would continually give in but not realise I was also giving away my self-worth and dignity. I was trading my worth for the acceptance of someone else.

Tragic mistake!

This is not about feminism or fighting for equal rights with the genders but about my basic human rights and personal need for psychological space as it were. It took so long to realise I did not have to work to gain someone's love! I'm so thankful for the friends who spoke into my life and helped bring me out... It was a friend's husband, Alex, who also contributed to dissolving the confusing thoughts going through my mind when he said, something along the lines of, 'Do you think no one will want you if you leave?'

Honestly, I don't think I had thought that far...

But he had a point. Alex made a valid argument. What was the 'real' reason why I found it hard to walk away? Or get out of this situation?

The Christian outlook I had embraced was that of God-hating divorce. Yes, I saw that, but did he permit this way of suffering too? Also, the warped idea that *I had laid this bed and I had to die in it*, was very alive in my head.

Where did it come from?

What kind of thoughts do you need to change?

CAN YOU SEE A FACE MARK?

I think to this day, I marvel at the different influences from culture, environment, background, media (TV and soaps), church and friendships that contribute to shaping our thinking!

I had been so convinced I had to fix the relationship, grin and bear it, or die trying to make it work.

There were friends that helped bring me out by speaking into my thinking and challenging me to look at the consequences of my actions or non-actions and its impact on the children.

So many times, I felt I was beyond help! Yet help was available I just had to accept that I was deserving of receiving it.

Dear reader, you are worthy of good things, good life and good relationships. Keep thinking and saying it to yourself and your mind will soon catch up with your words and your body will respond as well as your attitude. They told me that, “you’ll have a stigma.” **What stigma?** A divorcee? Really? But it's not written on my forehead, is it? And it's only an event that took place. *It does not define me!*

In any case, many other events took place in the interim, some of which I cannot go into here. Finally, things came to a head, moving swiftly in favour of a permanent separation. The decision to go file for divorce followed some drama.

I was receiving so many threats about being put to shame. I was not exactly sure what for. I do remember having to set up financial endeavours in joint names so as I began to come to ‘my senses’, I request a dissolution of all these. I decided to seek legal help with a legal separation and subsequently a change of name.

Within two months of the estrangement, I had all my official documents reverted to my maiden name including the certificate for the then, imminent Master’s degree from the City University, UK.



I can't believe I took this picture of me



Photo at the graduation of my Master's Degree – Medical Informatics

What seemed like an impossible task, 'getting heard' in my relationship seemed to happen so suddenly after a few changes in my own self-perception and behaviour.

If only I knew earlier, how much power I possessed as an individual, some of my sufferings would have been alleviated sooner.

At the request of the other party, after I moved out, we began to attend counselling sessions. It seemed at first that boundaries were being established and we were going to move forward with salvaging the marriage. At the second session, we were reminded that the purpose of the meeting was to find a way forward but it seemed bitterness played a huge part of the conversation, after so many years of 'not being heard' I did not know how to communicate what I wanted. More drama followed as you can imagine because I began to articulate and vocalize my Internalised feelings and these were not well received. (I guess I use the word drama so often because I like to think creatively about how behaviour is expressed – pardon the pun 😊). There were more dialogues and conversations from both parties about what had gone wrong and that was it!

The third time we came back, the pastor said not to bother anymore as he did not see any real desire to move forward. He advised me to seek counsel from the lead woman pastor figure. I did as instructed and explained when I met her, what had happened to deserve my audience with her. She promptly promised to call me back after our discussion but I do not believe the phone call ever got through to my phone network! Days and nights fused into one as there was not much difference between either. In those days, the pattern of my life was waking up, attend to the children, do the school run, eat, talk to mum and go back to bed. This went on for a period of a year or so. It felt I was walking through a trance, living in someone else's life or their world.

Thank God for Sundays as they provided a welcome distraction from the self-focus or self-absorbed world I was immersed in.

What changes can you make about the way you communicate?

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE CHILDREN?

This story will not be balanced or accurate without mentioning its impact on the children – the ones innocent in all this...

One day my mum called my attention to the rehearsal and accounts of my 2-and-a-half-year-old daughter who sat under the table, reliving and recounting events between her parents.

She kept repeating over and over "Daddy hit mummy! Daddy kicked mummy..." I was so shocked to hear how her memory was playing the scene over and over, as she recounted her version of events. It was a wakeup call for me as you can imagine. The story so far makes me look innocent, but that is so far from it!

I'm embarrassed to admit that our children learned early on, to call the authorities when they sensed an escalating argument in the home. You hear so many stories about people reacting in self-defence whenever they were in a threatening situation. Well, I kind of resorted to 'unfamiliar' strange means to defend myself, (you will have to hear this bit on a one on one basis). I remember one occasion when they visited because they heard a child call the police! To protect myself at times, I learned a few skills including the ability to utilise other tools in the house to defend myself (I'll say no more).

The recent move and change in address were beginning to take its toll on the children I seemed oblivious to its impact on them. Also, mum called me one day to witness one of the children hiding behind the sofa after he had taken a sweet without my approval. It seemed like it was time I paid more attention to the kids' needs and I had always wanted the children to have brilliant white, non-problematic teeth unlike my own experience; but one of the children was thinking differently. I was then too busy to notice the adventurous nature of my son – quite funny, really.

It took another close friend's comments to shock me into considering that the children might be suffering the temporary 'loss' of their parent as well and probably needed the security and reassurance mummy could provide.

Because I had become so absorbed with the pressures of having to change my 'mind-set' 'quickly, think for myself again, make my own decisions, deal with seeming 'harassment' and threats, handle the new task of being *mum and dad* to 3 vulnerable young children, it was a very tough time!

Since I had been unaware of the pain my children might have been feeling, a subtle reminder of my role as a parent, from a friend, was timely as it diverted the focus away from me to other areas of gain. Back then it was not easy to decide what story to tell the children as things were so distorted. Questions like "where is daddy? When will we see him again?" If ever, were very difficult to answer.

I had resolved within me that the children were not going to be used as a pawn and that they had a right to access their father. I think I had heard enough stories of children being shut out of talk and negotiations involving connections with an estranged parent to avoid that route and cause of action. I had also heard of many needless battles over where the children live or who they lived with. So, embarrassing this story, about what transpired in the wake of court-after-court proceedings about where the children lived and who was responsible for their welfare, but I'll share it.

It was a lovely hot summer day. The children were due to be picked up for the weekend away. And the matter of maintenance and support for the children was still up in the air. I resorted to somewhat unfamiliar means of communication to encourage some kind of financial support from their estranged parent.

When their dad arrived he noticed that the children's clothes were old! And my son's trousers (pants) were just below the knee, so they were neither shorts nor trousers.



Sometime when I started volunteering! - 2010



My then-teenage children, Dami and Bobbee

I was then asked the question, “Where are the children’s clothes?” I can’t remember my exact words but I think they were to this effect: the children can wear whatever clothes you have bought them, as that was all I could muster back then. The result following this incredible idea of mine was that when they were returned to us (my mum and I), they had a different set of clothes on. There were then two invisible wardrobes for the children, one at mine the other at their dad’s. They would wear the clothes I bought on their way to his, wear the ones he bought over there, then return to me in the clothes I bought them. Quite confusing for the children it must have been and I am not too proud of this either.

Another issue which seemed like a potential court matter was the other party’s refusal to share or divulge the exact location the children were being taken to when visiting with him. It made me feel so powerless and irresponsible as a parent at the time. It was interesting then, that the male judge presiding over the matter about residence (where the children lived) dismissed my concerns about the missing contact address. In those days I had to release the children from a location (my mum’s) to an unknown one.

This was too painful for me and the temptation to refuse the children access to their father was very real to me. The presiding judge was of the opinion that even if the children were being taken to a box under the bridge, as long as they were returned to their mother, it was OK! That statement came as a shock from a man of incredible experience and expertise. In retrospect, I am glad; we finally came to an agreement about where the children lived and how often they had access to their father.

It did not solve future problems though...



Ayo! Photo credit: Ayo

Dr. ARINOLA ARABA



My Catwalk in Barking and Dagenham 2015
Photo credit: Jay Bright Photography

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What are the children's needs?

Dr. ARINOLA ARABA

HEALING- TIME FOR A CHANGE?

There is a time for everything... what are your thoughts so far?

What seemed like an impossible task, 'getting heard' in my relationship seemed to happen so suddenly: after a few changes in my own self-perception and behaviour.

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What small changes do you need to make?

Prior to the break up, I had pleaded for us to get some marriage counselling, before things got really bad but there always seemed to be some sort of excitement prior to the allotted time or as we drove to the destination, enough to cause us to abandon the quest and turn the car back towards home. I had long given up pursuing this line of action which was emotionally draining at the time. So it came as a surprise that after I moved out the other party requested that we began to attend counselling sessions. I was inundated with phone calls from the pastor at a time when I was not only grieving over my dad's passing but taking my final exams for the Master's programme.

We finally attended the long-awaited first counselling session. It seemed at first that boundaries were being established and we were going to move forward with salvaging the marriage. At the second session, we were reminded that the purpose of the meeting was to find a way forward but it seemed bitterness played a huge part of the conversation since after so many years of 'not being heard' I did not really know how to communicate what I wanted. More drama, more talk followed about what had gone wrong and that was it, at least from the counsellor's point of view. The third time we came back for a session, the counsellor wasted no time in announcing that we both need not bother coming anymore as he did not see any real desire to move forward.

It was a waste of time... or it turned out to be.

Do you need a third party to intervene?

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He advised me to seek counsel from the lead woman pastor figure. I did as instructed and explained what had happened to deserve my audience with her. She promptly promised to call me back after our discussion but I do not believe the phone call ever got through to my phone network connections till today.

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Are there trusted and committed people you can talk to?

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I forgot to add that the word divorce came into a conversation that happened after our third failed counselling session. It knocked me for six as they say, as I was speechless when the words from this not-so-surprising-at-this-time request began to register. Why? Maybe there was some acceptance that this was a way to move forward for the future.

BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED

What is the future of your relationship going to look like?

My thoughts were: Divorce? What? How come?

How is that a solution? Really? Is that what this was all about? A whole maze of confusing words and images flashed before me. It took me a while to respond as I think I had my mouth open in shock. After I gathered my thoughts, I asked for some time to think through the request, a valid one at best. I could not handle a discussion at that point since I had to drive back to pick the 3 beauties on my usual school run about 40 miles away.

Another sleepless night followed. Not sure what conversations I had with God that night as I was still shocked at the turn of events. You can imagine what it was like to feel the rug was being pulled out from under your feet or your world has just dropped. It sure lasted long enough for me to come up with phrases, quotes of all sorts. I remember at some point coining the phrase, "stop the world, I want to get off."

What do you feel is spinning out of control?

Thankfully we had a lawyer in the family, nothing like the one of “my cousin Vinny” fame, but one more experienced in these legal matters. He knew someone who could provide some help. That's how the divorce journey started. It seemed I was going through the motions at the time, just following one instruction after another from the legal person. My youngest was about 2 and a half years old making the oldest just over 6!

How did I get here though? A divorce?

Is that not the one thing other people did when they did not want to work things out? Maybe that's where I was. Anyhow, I had to either go back and ask for consideration for the children, save the marriage or go ahead with the permanent separation as requested.

After a few more phone calls with repeated requests for the same thing, I came to a firm decision: go ahead and file for a divorce. Now at least, I would get some sleep at night and know that I tried to salvage things as best I knew. A few appointments with the legal representative got things moving but I was unprepared for the reaction at the other end. It seemed that they had not bargained for the realities of a divorce and were surprised that I was even proceeding to file first.

At that time, I felt that I was close to losing my mind. Starting the proceedings would give me some peace about finding a solution to the matter. I can't express how thankful I am that my mum was here. She took us in and played a part I never imagined existed. While I was trying to figure out the next steps, sadly, I lost my dad. Another blow!

You know they say, troubles happen in threes. Was there another disaster looming to complete the triad? Well, I don't remember the third, sorry.

Is there a family member who can provide support or even a listening ear?

We had to travel to Nigeria to hold the burial rites for daddy and I decided to use my maiden name on my documents which fuelled further shock about my intention to depart from the relationship.

The ceremony for daddy was comforting and I was surrounded by the extended family so I had a good support system. I had planned to travel with the young children but the drama surrounding parental custody, residence and court orders proved deterrent enough to warrant me opting for them to stay with a family friend the week I was away.

What kind of considerations are there for children (if there are any)?

More drama awaited me at home in Lagos, Nigeria and there were more questions for which I was expected to provide answers. The family wanted to understand why I was separating from the marriage. In a culture where divorce was greeted with comments like "what?" "that's the effect of the culture abroad," "that's not allowed," "you stay there and make things work," it suggested or seemed to advocate that you had to remain in the marriage against all odds, if necessary. (My perception anyway)

Are ***there extended family or trusted friends, groups who can support?***

The funeral was over and after a few failed attempts at a family discussion about the relationship, over in Nigeria, it was beginning to hit home; this was happening to me. Me. No one else. Not somebody over there. Me. Just me.

How are you feeling about the events described?

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I flew back to London earlier than other family members as I was so eager to hold my children again. So glad to see them after the "excitement" over the travel arrangements without them, I was grateful that they were with me. The battle over the "residence" of the children was just getting started. We had a few court appearances before it finally settled in favour of the children staying with me. I felt I was going to lose my mind in those with the to-ing and fro-ing that was taking place in those days.

BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED

Will talking to someone help, perhaps a supernatural person?

Those days, it felt like I was in court for one thing or the other, almost like we had a never-ending case. It was the children, the house, money affairs, Decree Nisi - the lot!

I think one of the circuit judges once remarked, "I have made a ruling on this case before..." or something to that effect after a matter was coming up again and again with regards to the children.

I was getting one letter after another from the Court and had to take time off work on one occasion, to attend a hearing. In my head, I was resolved to let personal matters stay apart from work ones and thought it was good to try and agree on matters quickly to avoid repeated Court sessions which could prove disruptive to work. Sadly, sometimes I would attend the legal building without the other party showing up. When the divorce process was ongoing I was late to the reading of names for the Decree Nisi. I was torn between asking for a repeat of the process and leaving without asking so I made a decision. I was beginning to make more decisions in those days. Earlier on, I remember being ridiculed and told I was incapable of making my own decisions. It seemed common to hear comments like, "Is that what your mum told you to do?" There had been so many phone calls to threaten and warn me not to attend court, so much excitement.

This day, I had to make a special request that the judge have the names of separating couples read again. I had heard so many times that I would not succeed with the filing and wanted to make sure it happened. You know what it's like when you need to hear something first-hand rather than be told about it.

Thankfully, the judge was agreeable as he announced that he would grant my request and permitted the reading once again. It felt like a big weight was lifted... I had to tell my head and mind that this had actually happened, for my peace and sanity.

You can make requests to The Court, like asking to repeat a ruling.

What a total waste of time!

I would write reports, after reports, go over events in my head, and try to articulate an accurate account to make a case as to why I thought the children were better off with me as their mum. The legal team put me through the paces, helping me write coherently and supporting me during the case. I do however remember the melodrama surrounding one of the first hearings where my defence counsel did not show up in court! I was open to ridicule on that day as my defence looked weak if not for the intervention of the court-based Citizens Advice bureau's case-handler who stepped in to provide moral support. My mother was amazing! The children were settling and forming a bond with her as I went about trying to gain some sort of financial independence to prepare for single mum-hood.

Which family members can be a source of support?

Maintenance payments arrangements were getting complex by the minute as negotiations fell apart before they were even started and I resolved to not pursuing this as it involved so much energy, not to mention the pursuing. The phone calls in those days were many, fast and furious in nature; and came one after another from a private number. I began to recognise a pattern to their timing and frequency so I decided not to answer the calls. Of course that turned out to be a stupid decision when the hospital my daddy had been admitted to, wanted to get in touch with me, to inform me that my dad had taken a turn for the worse. They could not get hold of me!

So somehow they got contacts for another member of the family who then scolded me for not being available to answer hospital calls. It was fear again.

I was too scared to take phone calls just in case they turned out to be threats, accusations and more. Even my email accounts were raided as I was used to sharing my password. I also found out that my emails were being read as someone else had logged in. My email account -sharer now had so much information about my emails they became another subject to threaten me with. This came at a time I had been negotiating changing the name on my Master's degree certificate to my maiden name.

That phase passed and I became stronger after making some decisions and taking small steps.

Is it time to change some passwords or get new email accounts?

SMALL STEPS

What most people might take for granted, choosing to upgrade a phone at the end of a contract, turned out to be an uphill task for me, punctuated with so many emotions. I used to get told what make of phone to sign up for. Now, I had the choice...the freedom, to pick and choose what model of upgraded phone I WANTED. That felt so good. And I think a little bit of my spontaneous nature, was creeping back.

What little steps can you take to gain some of your independence?

Next, I remember taking a trip to Calais in France. It was actually a matter of ringing a bus travel agency and making a booking. It was that easy, apart from other small matters like paying for the ticket and getting up early enough on the day. *Again I was deciding to do something for me...*

Around the time we parted, I was back in the same church and after a month of festivities and goal setting for the new year, I decided it was time to take on the development of a 'new me.' One time earlier, my mum asked if I had not realised how big I had become because I was sporting a size 20/22. I was asked if I ever looked in the mirror to see the changes in my body. The last thing I did in those days was looking at myself in the mirror. Why? I knew I would see and have to face what I did not want to deal with.

This time I had had enough. It was time for the weight to go. Taking the fruit and vegetable requirements a bit further, I began to drink fruit "smoothies," more vegetables and water. Not much a fan of exercise, I walked a little more in those days and was richly rewarded with a dress size drop to 16! Only, I put the weight back on, later, as I was missing other elements of my diet and began to add them back again. So I learned its best to eat to live and be healthy rather take the weight off quickly.

Mum invested in *Elizabeth Arden cosmetics* so I would take an interest in my appearance, an art *I had lost for a few years now*. It felt good to be able to make some small changes to me and my appearance.

I remember in those days how I would sit and talk to mum every night. It was like a talking therapy session with your usual shrink!

It happened without any prior bookings and she would listen as I talked and talked my heart out. The first night after the separation I found it hard to cry as I think I was more in shock and in a 'let-things-happen' head zone.

It felt like I was an observer in the mess unfolding before me. You may understand that for years I had not had a proper conversation with my mum. But that night I was talking so much like someone had taken the **lid off a tap** which had so much to release. I remember being offered some alcohol which I kindly declined - that would not look good for a Christian anyway. I talked with mum regularly until it came to a point where I told her I had no more to say! So I think when that tank became empty it left room for the entry of good things but that did not happen immediately.

A few far-from-cordial exchanges in the church setting with accusations, threats and more when I was with the children or they were with their other family, which was much worse, cemented the idea that it was time to change churches.

Seriously, my mum thought it was time for me to listen...She calmly explained that my passion for God could be served elsewhere as the current worship centre did not have a monopoly on God. Really? But I love that church, I argued. Now, I was beginning to think for myself and make decisions that suited me. Well, mum reminded me that it was not the best atmosphere for the children, watching exchanges with their parents in God's house (or something to that effect). OK.

So yes I had found freedom but now I was going to exercise it differently by taking advice and making an informed decision. After a few Sundays away from the church at the time, I began searching for another place of worship. It was not long before I found a place that has become home for 13 years to the children and me. I think the first shock I had was when I witnessed the simplicity of praying and asking for God's intervention in matters.

What was that? They simply read the prayer requests, asked the congregation to pray and it was done.

No shouting or dramatising or changing postures, pacing back and forth, no drama or theatrics. Just prayer. Ask. Believe. Expect. And done.

We quickly settled into a new supportive family and the children loved it. They were receiving lessons in skating, keyboard playing, dancing and singing. There were so many exciting activities that kept them wanting more of the church, week after week. So we stayed in Hillsong. It took about an hour to travel by car but I believe it was an answer to prayer.

Driving lessons were next on the agenda. It would be handy for school runs and the juggling of after school activities. In those days it was a mad dash from work to after school club then to music keyboard, swimming, first aid, guitar and all others thrown in - children enjoyed these. Later years, I remember my PA reminding me to leave the office early to pick up children for their various activities.

The driving 'thing' was fraught with drama and a crisis in confidence because I remember being told I would never be able to drive a car with a manual transmission. It was good that I was learning then I could choose to believe what I wanted and act according to those beliefs.

As a man thinks in his heart so is he!

Crucial intervention

One night, I think, two days after the separation and moving in with mum, I woke up with the idea that it was time to return to the same relationship I had just fled. Why would I think that?

I felt that I owed it to the other party to return 'home' following numerous phone calls and fear of what loomed for the children and me. Like my existence was entirely for them...I wonder now, where that thinking came from. You can imagine the shock my mum greeted my thoughts with. She thought I was beyond belief. It seemed I had not learned anything yet! I remember her saying that if I had no compassion for her as a mother and did not think twice about her losing a daughter, at least I should think of the children and their fate if I had to return after all the drama and intervention to get me out. Those utterances shocked me.... but I was still unconvinced about staying away until...

Dream message

I went back to bed, whether the same day or after, I'm not sure. And fell into a dream. It was a 3-way conversation and I sat opposite one of the individuals. They were so caring and loving and I remember talking on and on about my troubles. In those days, it seemed I was defined by my situation and problems, as I was always quick to offer a summary of my latest challenges and pain as a way of introducing myself to people! How selfish?

Anyway, my companions were listening to what I had to say when I was interjected by a dominant one. He asked me where I got the idea that marriage was supposed to be so hard, sad and brutal. He told me He was a God of Love and my idea of love did not come from Him.

So where did it come from?

I was jolted awake from sleep to think about what I had seen and heard. So somewhere in my subconscious was the embedding of the fact that I had to suffer in a relationship. But people I knew took decisions to escape in their own situations. I had to examine my own beliefs to get to the root of these false messages.

My mum was so elated; she danced and thanked God for getting through to me! After that, there were other conversations with the Voice (as I think is best to call Him). He became such a close companion, adviser, comforter and explained things to me over and over again. Even on one occasion, I was in the kitchen when after some more disturbing phone calls and I had argued about some other issues in my previous relationship, he gently and softly reminded me of the need to consider behaviour over utterance. "By their fruits you shall know them"

Church had introduced me to a new family, friendships also an environment of faith, trust and purpose. One of the most impacting books I ever read was called 'The Purpose Driven Life'. Information about my design, shape, culture, gifting, skills, talents even skin tone were all indications to the part my life is supposed to play on earth!

Wow! I had never heard that put in that way before...so I did not need to apologise for who I was, who I am, even more, all these other opinions didn't matter in the great scheme of things. I had a loving creator who delighted in me, just the way I am and being me was pleasing Him. God mattered and His opinion far better outweighs other think tanks, criticism and thoughts on who I should or shouldn't be. The fact that I was uniquely created and designed for a higher call was so liberating. You will never know how much. It was so impacting that I started a course based on this book with some like-minded friends - a 40-day journey to be spread across 40 weeks in the year.

I think I revelled in the joy of gifting the said book to other people and loved getting the remarks and testimonials back after people read them. I think it's time to do this again!

Faith and learning again

It took faith to get up every day and just get on with l-i-f-e. One day at a time.

A conversation I had by inspiration, told me that *people would not just stay home, refusing to leave the house or do anything, because they feared for their life, or of being killed or being involved in an accident. They still made appointments, with no idea whether they would live the next day.* I was encouraged to make plans, prepare for good things and take steps towards those goals. The best part, I see now, is the power of writing things down.

Another thought that entered my head again said, "You were not created to be a slave..." and again when I was contemplating going back a few days after 'leaving' I was reminded of these words, "by their fruits ye shall know them." I was encouraged to pay attention to behaviour more than words and promises. These were hard to hear.

Crucial to my recovery was the lost art of reading! The ones with the most impact were the "Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren, "Women who Love too much" by Robin Norwood, Men Who Hate Women: When Love Hurts and You Don't Know Why by Dr. Susan Forward and "Divorce, Marriage and Remarriage" by Kenneth Hagin.

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What have you learned about your emotions?

BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED

LETTERS FROM A CHILD...

*Imagine how happy we will be when we see life as a child does.
(Arinola Araba)*

I included this chapter with permission to make a plea on behalf of children of parents who must separate, so we spare a thought for the feelings and the welfare of the innocent children involved in the mess. My then-teenage daughter permitted me to share her own thoughts.

If your child could tell a story about home life, what would they say?

COMPLETELY NORMAL AND FROM A 'BROKEN HOME'

Introduction:

I was feeling boring, and useless – well depressed, just like most typical teenagers. Only, I'm just not a typical teenager. I know everyone says they are different, special, and unique. I wrestle with that a lot.

How can everyone be special?

Let me explain my point of view in this... Everyone is different, only a select few are special, yet we are all unique in our silly little ways. I'm not a pessimist, only rather sarcastic about all attributes to life.

I haven't had my heart broken or anything! I'm not old enough for that. I don't care what anyone says, I'm just not. Anyhow, I just think I'm entitled to say what I truly think, (not that I hold back anyway). I decided to write this short book, I hope it helps. I am from what you may call a 'broken home'.

Statistically, 1 in 4 marriages end this way, (learned that in sociology). I got to thinking about how many of the children have a keen interest in English literature?

How many have my style of writing or interesting taste in fashion? How many have my name? Well. I am unique. I'm not sure if this will make sense to you now, but I was born in Paddington, West London. Enjoy.

How can we make the home a safe setting for the children?

PAST LIFE IN NORTH LDN:

If it wasn't already obvious, my mum and dad are divorced. They had 3 'interesting' children and were married for around 7 years. They've now been divorced for nearly 12 years. I want to say everything went smoothly, it didn't. Going back as far as I can remember, we lived in the Annex in a little flat. I forget if my brother existed just yet, but my head says he did.

One night, I was playing with my colourful Chico kitchen set. I would probably have fun playing with it now, don't repeat that. I was happily cooking some fruit, (yes cooking fruit); mixing it with only God knows what. I was so content.

My theory is you will only be happy for a matter of moments; I'm working on my pessimistic side with Jesus. A shout came from the bedroom. My parents were arguing; I was told to call the police. Being maybe 3, this is a complicated request, right?

Wrong, I'm special.

I called them and said what I was told to say. I don't remember knowing the address, I reckon I had help there, someone must have shouted it to me. I stood by the phone, and what in what seemed like minutes the door was being banged on. When the police came up, and they did, I was moved to the side and told to go and play. They charged up the stairs and into my parents' room, I don't know what happened from thereon.

When I was old enough to question this event properly I found out it was something trivial. My dad thought mum was cheating apparently. I guess I'll never know.

Another time, I was playing on this almost beige coloured computer that still had a massive back on it, an old-fashioned Windows 97 machine.

There's going to be a lack of description here, it was more than

a decade ago, so don't judge me! It was a Thomas the Tank Engine game, and for me, it was the best thing since sliced bread. We lived in a three-bedroom house I think, East Link Avenue North. It was a nice area, I think. So anyway, there I was, playing this game, with my brother on this brick of a computer, and we heard a thud from upstairs.

My sister and I bolted up the white bannister-less stairs. We had, I think a light brown carpet over it, so it was relatively safe, but I question how I ran up them so often so boldly, nowadays I would be careful. She burst into our parents' room and was ordered by my dad to go downstairs...

Are there any traumatic events that could have been handled differently?

I WAS TAKEN AWAY...

I followed, heard the order, and went back down disheartened. Even now, I get that same feeling when he shouts at me, some things never change. That's just one particularly bad memory in the otherwise lovely little house. I had some good ones too. Around the same time, my dad and I used to watch the wrestling...We both particularly liked the wrestler Stone Cold Steve Austin, he had a particular saying that we both liked. The Rock, the Undertaker and Cain were also around at this time. One fine, fine day, my daddy drove us near Burger King. The chips... YUCK. When I was younger, I hated their chips with a burning passion, they were too different. Up until now, I don't think I had experienced McDonalds yet though. Stone Cold was featured on the Burger King cups. These events are a landmark in my memory, and for the life of me, I can't tell you why.

Till this day, I don't know what was really happening. I would always be told, "When you're 18, I'll tell you!", "You'll know when you're 18!", "Ask me when you're 18?" That's in a few months now. So, the next thing I could tell you is the day when I was taken away from home.

Before I get to that, let me just say, my mum left for a while. Soon, in the middle of the night, we followed. My uncle on my mums' side came to get us. I'd never seen him before, and I was woken from sleep.

This all amalgamated to the children in the back of a car on the way to Lark ham. Up until then, I had been a Northern girl. I went to Stafforn Hill Park schools. That school is gone now, I think... In the middle of the night, my mother took us. That was that.

We were out of there, I remember looking back and my dad was shouting his head off. After an argument or two, we were on our way, bags packed, and out of there.

This was the first time I'd met my uncle, and the first time I remember seeing my grandmother, my nana. *The move was hard, and we didn't see our dad for a very long time. I remember being happy anyhow.*

Past Life in the North

In this part of my life, I met one of my 'bestest' friends ever. I won't tell you her name, but let's call her Chelsea. She was amazing if I'm honest. I've never been one for making friends, but she decided she wanted to be my friend, and that was that. I met her at the Infants School in the middle of year 1. She brought me out of my shell and we were soon as thick as thieves. I don't remember too much that happened at school, but I think I enjoyed it, and she helped me to. I met other people and had my first crush. On this boy called Luke. I loved him. Love in the way you love a chocolate bar when you are 5. I remember my favourite song was the Ketchup song, I'm sure everyone knows the song and the dance. We used to spend time dancing to that song and singing it in playtime and the golden time. I also liked Atomic Kitten, not like I was old enough to understand the 'eternal flame' they were singing about, but it was catchy, I was in love with their group. Music-wise, I had an unhealthy obsession with S-Club 7.

Yes, S-Club 7. I knew every song, all the lyrics, had the CDs, DVDs all sorts. On my 7th birthday, around midnight, Bradley said happy birthday to me!

Take that with a pinch of salt if you will, but that's what my dad told me, and I was sooooo sure it was him, I recognised his voice. I was so excited and that put such a smile on my face.

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I was a normal child in school, played kiss chase, went on trips, talked about PE and ran around like a lunatic. I liked sport and skipping – especially skipping. We played all those silly skipping games, sang the songs and really enjoyed doing it.

BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED

Do the children understand why their lives are changing?

NORMAL BUT WITH NO DAD!

We played all those silly skipping games, sang the songs and really enjoyed doing it. To be perfectly honest, if you handed me a skipping rope and offered to do play the games with me now, I'd indulge and enjoy it. That is no secret, approaching 18, I am still incredibly childish.

Out of school, I was normal, but with no dad!

I don't remember this affecting me too much yet, my uncle was sometimes around. As I got older, my dad got a visiting order from the courts. Fortnightly, we went to stay with him. For a long time, we stayed at my other nana's. My dad's mum. She was nice to us too, and always had food in the house. I have 3 uncles and an aunt on my dad's side. I haven't met one of my uncles even now, neither am I sure that he is aware of my existence, but no matter. I digress.

My nana would always make her special Sunday roast on the Sunday before we were driven back to my mothers' for around half 6. Usually, we were late, and my dad was always in a rush to get ready for church, as he'd dash us to Home and rush off to Church.

We went to the same church too for a while until one day, my mum upped and left. The reason being, we saw a church on TV while visiting my mother's friend in Manchester, and my mum thought it was a good idea. So, just like that, we went. It was in a theatre in London. They rented the building, and I and my siblings went to the "Kids Church." I recall there was a time when we went to all the services, and I don't remember how many there were, but there were quite a few. I loved *loved, loved*, kids church, and we did mini-activities like dancing and skateboarding. It was there where I first decided to give my life to Christ.

I was prayed for and the leaders smiled. I did it a few Sundays in a row, so I'm not sure if God took me seriously. He must have laughed just thinking about me. After a day's church, my mum would treat me to my favourite chocolate bar – a Dream bar. I haven't seen one of those in such a long while, adored them. There was a limited edition where they had strawberries in it too. Oh, that white chocolate bar was heaven, and only 60p or so. Considering it was being sold in a café in Central London, that was quite cheap. The church we moved to is called Hillsong London. I still go to that church now.

During half-term, Christmas, New Year and Summer, my parents would alternate taking us kids. I know that despite no longer being a part of the older church I attended their annual conference. I loved it. When I was younger I made a very silly mistake, and sat on the wrong side of the kids' room, and was put in a lower age group category than I was. For embarrassment, when I was asked, I lied about my age; I didn't want them to know I got my age wrong, so I stayed with the toddlers, drawing. When I told my dad, he laughed. A few years later, the next time I went to their conference, I was with my two cousins; one from my mums' side, and one from my dads'. My girl cousin welcomed me, and I was put in her class, along with my boy cousin. We attended a Bible class formatted programme, and I remember having quite a lot of Bible knowledge, I read my kids bible with pictures every night at my mum's with the family, and we prayed.

My boy-cousin, well he didn't do so well and managed to alienate the 'popular girls' in the class. 3 girls seemed to be the 'it girls'. I remember being scared of them. Yes, I used to go to the previous London church, but as far as I'm concerned, this is the first I'd seen of them.

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They seemed nice, but I had no intention of finding out if they were or not. I kept my head down, and they didn't bother me. I was jealous that they got a lot of attention from the boys, but I did nothing about it. One boy seemed to be endlessly talking to me though despite my big head, and silly little pattern cornrows. If my memory serves me correctly, he was cute. I digress.

I didn't exactly settle into my dad's side of life. When I was there, I was there, but more often than not, I wasn't there...

BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED

Do the children need to talk about the adjustments taking place at home or at school?

I MAY HAVE MINOR TRUST ISSUES

On occasion, during half-terms, when we're staying at with my dad we would go to up north to church and east, up until they moved venues to make room for the Olympics I wouldn't even spot the youth. When they moved to the east, every time I was there, on my way to a seat, I would see them, sitting on the stairs like ravenous birds of prey watching fresh meat walkthrough. I think they were mainly boys, my age or a year or two older. I dread to know what it would be like if I went now, with the way I look and dress now. My point is, I wouldn't be too comfortable, with what I'm going through now ... A change in style, taste and body shape. The latter tends to severely restrict what I may wear on a normal day; half of my wardrobe remains un-used. These kids would probably look at me weirdly thinking "Who is she?", "Where did she come from?", and quite frankly, very few of them would know

At my own church, despite being a very long-standing member, I am quite a-social. This being in the sense that I don't talk to too many people and the sheer size of the church hindered any 'popularity' I could have had.

I'm not really that type of girl though, as I don't speak to people if I can help it, and avoided gatherings, connect groups and the like. Yet, recently, having decided to be more 'sociable' or whatever the term would be, I endeavoured to attend every gathering and dinner party since February. So far, I have not missed many, and I have come to like the people I do life with at church.

My point being, I am an introvert, but once I decide I want to talk and be social, boy am I just that.

It was from this that I concluded that I may have minor attachment or trust issues. But doesn't every teenage girl? I know that I find it hard to accept new people just like that; it's something I am personally working on, without a therapist. I'm not a fan of shrinks. You talk for an hour, and they ask questions to which you already know the answers. You pay shed-loads to find out what you suspected.

Pointless? Right?

Back to me being an introvert. Sociologists may want to argue this may be down to the breakdown of my family and I may have felt that I had no-one to confide in.... Sure.

What if I didn't want to confide in anyone? I know that even now, I don't tell my friends everything. I've learned not to. Some things can be shared with people, but at the end of the day, as soon as you share a 'secret' with a friend, it is no longer a 'secret'. This is common knowledge though. Anyway, so if I called you a 'friend' I meant it.

I was never really mean or rude person when I was younger, that came with age, along with a temper. My temper took quite a while to properly develop. I didn't actually have any fights at school. When I was asked, I would say I didn't believe in violence. That was true at that point. The reason why, I had found out that my mum may have been abused – Violence. The very word was ugly to me. I knew that my mum was always hurt after an argument and at one point her knee was bleeding. This was when we lived up North, and had an au pair, and coincidentally where I developed my fear of big dogs and encountered my first bee.

I had always suspected that there was some foul play, but I could never have known for sure.

At this season in life I did everything I could to avoid fights, looking bad I did okay. I didn't have any fights. But as I got older, I learned how to slap, and boy I no longer feared violence. Even now, I am not necessarily a violent person; I could deal with some very hard kicks, slaps or punches in the back. But, my weapon of choice is my words, a very unreliable weapon. Sometimes, words fail me, and I wouldn't think, they just came out.

I remember being in a few situations where I couldn't think of a proper comeback until after the 'cussing match'. Other times, I would be in the zone and would deliver an unbelievable melee of sharp words, and I was branded harsh. I still haven't found a happy medium. Pray for me. Having said all this, I don't think I'm much different from any other teenager. Let's be honest, teens are mean, and we know this. I'm not a rare breed. They're moody, hormonal, bad-tempered and rather sullen at the best of time.

What issues are the children facing because of the turmoil at home?

MORE OF LIFE IN LDN

So, the next thing I will briefly mention is that I didn't know at all how to talk to or relate to boys. I was insecure, well, I still am. I didn't know how to act or be around them, so for a few years, I acted up, and behaved rather weird. I was in 'love' with the idea of being in a relationship, and skipped from one-fortnight relationship to another, many crossed over each other. The less said about this madness, the better. They don't count for anything now. It was a label that I desperate to be wearing. I recently realised that I still don't know how to talk to some boys. I find that when I relax, I am okay, I'm calm. Yet, if I haven't known them for long, I am unsure about them and refuse to spend too much time with them. One of best friends prefers the company of a small group of boys as opposed to my group of very different girls. I may never understand this, but like I am constantly told, everyone is different. She says boys are less bitchy. Wrong! Boys are worse. Yes, worse. Have you heard how they talk about girls or each other for that matter? I think the main differences are biology, and boys are more upfront about feelings.

But, when I did have my first 'serious' relationship I counted the days. I wanted to talk to him all the time, every day and wanted his undivided attention. I'm not sure how that came to end even now, but I moved on. I'm firm friends with him, and we talk a lot sometimes, and between you and me, I think he likes me. No names mentioned, sorry! The next 'serious' relationship, I was the opposite until the end. I always doubted the boy and he probably got sick of it, this one was mutually ended, and we talk sometimes, but about school work, small talk mainly. I sucked at the girlfriend thing and probably still do.

By the time my GCSEs or AS exams came I ignored the boys I talked to until they were over and thanked myself warmly for getting rid of the distractions. I highly recommend this.

I'm not saying dump your boyfriend, but get some space to study and revise. I am the only one of my friends that did this, and I know this is cheeky, but I think, well I hope I will come out better for it. It doesn't hurt to do what you feel is right, you don't have to follow the crowd or your friends. At this point, following the crowd would be excessive alcohol and smoking shisha or weed. I don't like alcohol to begin with, so that is a hard thing for me to indulge in. I have never smoked weed, shisha or tobacco. I want to stay that way. One thing that you could say that I followed the crowd on would be getting my first piercing. This one was mainly due to being 16 and having finally gained my mothers' permission, and promising that I would pay for it myself.

I originally wanted my navel pierced, but when I went to the shop, they wanted my mum to be there, and I thought to forget that. I then looked into the nose piercings, and I decided I really wanted one. I warned my mum again that I was going to do it. I went to get a piercing in Upton Park. I found a nice little jeweller, and they charged me about £8 to do my nose. They said it usually costs £10. So, I got a discount. If I say it didn't hurt, I'd be lying. I came home with it, and my mum was so shocked, to be fair she didn't expect me to do it.

My dad. Oh, my dad, he flipped. He called my nana and told her, she in-turn flipped. They both hated it, but after a while, I made a stand and refused to get rid of it. He told me that it was a sign of slavery that I looked silly and disobedient and all the like. Recently, I got brave; I put a small silver ring in my nose. It took me a very long while to get used to seeing it in my nose, but it really grew on me. My dad hasn't seen the ring yet. I'm so bad.

I've been described as edgy and it has altered my dress sense slightly. It really went with all the creepers I had acquired in the last year. 6 pairs, I'm really going off them now though. That aside, my point is, I didn't develop this rebellious side from being from a broken home.

I think this was just a part of growing up. I now want a tattoo on my back saying, 'Proverbs 31' with a little red rose. I haven't done it, and may never do it. I remember my dad saying that if I ever got a tattoo there and bent over and it said something silly like 'juicy' or 'tasty', he'd kill me. I'm hoping I go off this idea, and that I will go off my nose piercing, and take it out one day. I guess I was just tired of looking plain. Yet, I still want my navel pierced, and I don't think that one will just fade away. I keep telling myself when I lose weight I will get it. I really want it, so I will lose the weight. At one stage, I also wanted three more ear piercings, but that is another story and I'm not so keen, but I rather like ear cuffs. On a good day, I will have one in each ear, and that's just how I roll.

I don't think there's a word for my dress sense. I'm not grungy, or girl. I am by no means normal. I can re-call some really rather random outfits. What you categorise me as?

Ending: Check back with me in a few years ;)

Are there any behavioural changes in the children that need addressing?

YOUR FINAL THOUGHTS...?

How about we do some affirmations together?

1-6 God, investigate my life;
get all the facts firsthand.
I'm an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
You know when I leave and when I get back;
I'm never out of your sight.
You know everything I'm going to say
before I start the first sentence.
I look behind me and you're there,
then up ahead and you're there, too—
your reassuring presence, coming and going.
This is too much, too wonderful—
I can't take it all in!
7-12 Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?
to be out of your sight?
If I climb to the sky, you're there!
If I go underground, you're there!
If I flew on morning's wings
to the far western horizon,

You'd find me in a minute—
you're already there waiting!
Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
At night I'm immersed in the light!"
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.
13-16 Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother's womb.
I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
I worship in adoration—what a creation!
You know me inside and out,
you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to
birth;
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
The days of my life all prepared
before I'd even lived one day.
17-22 Your thoughts—how rare, how beautiful!
God, I'll never comprehend them!

I couldn't even begin to count them—
any more than I could count the sand of the sea.
Oh, let me rise in the morning and live always with you!
And please, God, do away with wickedness for good!
And you murderers—out of here!—
all the men and women who belittle you, God,
infatuated with cheap god-imitations.
See how I hate those who hate you, God,
see how I loathe all this godless arrogance;
I hate it with pure, unadulterated hatred.
Your enemies are my enemies!
23-24 Investigate my life, O God,
find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me,
get a clear picture of what I'm about;
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—
then guide me on the road to eternal life.

Credit: Psalm 139: 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 Eugene
H. Peterson by NavPress Publishing

[Learn More About The Message](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“Arinola is a fun-loving, energetic mum to three young adults in university. Also, a multi-award nominee and winner, a fun-loving, writer, blogger, speaker, she is a social entrepreneur, founder and inventor of **the bMoneywise game** – a game that focuses on making maths fun and developing financial skills in children and young people.

First locally endorsed by Barking and Dagenham in 2014, the game gained national recognition as a best new product nomination at the Corporate Entrepreneur Awards 2015; then gained international recognition as a shortlist for the Reimagine Education award at the prestigious Wharton Business School, Pennsylvania, USA, in December 2016 & 2017. The game has also been featured in the 2017 and 2018 Annual National Personal Finance competition for teachers across the UK and has been sponsored by Moneywise, Old Mutual Wealth, Foreign & Colonial Investment Trust.

With a previous background in Medicine, Informatics and Management, Arinola previously held varied project management, audits and quality assurance roles in the NHS so becoming an inventor was an excellent chance for Arinola.

“Truth be told, Arinola dreams of a world where children and young adults are equipped with the tools and know-how to be financially literate. Arinola saw the need: many children struggle with maths and numeracy both at primary and secondary school levels.

The bMoneywise game was birthed out of that need when Arinola herself was out of work and had to teach her own children the value of money. It has a digital version which is recently being piloted amongst children and parents.

Presently, bMoneywise has grown to also become a youth-focused social enterprise and a games developer serving a growing demand for financial education resources.

It serves a mission to improve memory recall, comprehension and a savings habit while fostering a love of maths among UK-based school-age children 7 to 18 years old. Her work is excellent, very commendable and is impacting the lives of children and young people in the local community where she lives and beyond."

Arinola and her daughter Dami were featured in a factual BBC documentary called "I Blame My Parents," which aired on January 20, 2019. It can be viewed here on the BBC website or YouTube: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p06xdngj/i-blame-my-parents> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJHOAhE-ajI>

Arinola has been sought for interviews by the BBC and ITV.

Awards and Nominations:

- Business in the Community (winner, innovative social-entrepreneur) – 2013
- Chamber of Commerce –nominee, Innovation 2013
- East Thames Community Awards – Winner, Best Supporting organization 2015
- Chamber of Commerce – nominee, Innovation 2016
- Corporate Entrepreneur Award – Best New Product, UK 2015
- Reimagine Education, Wharton USA, Presence Learning Finalist – 2016
- Barking and Dagenham recognition awards - 2017
- Reimagine Education – Finalist, User Led Innovation 2017/8
- Women in Business – Wise Woman Awards - 2018
- Women in Financial Advice – Finalist 2018
- Diversity & Inclusive Company awards – Nominee 2018
- Gathering of Africa's Best Finalist - 2018

Other books by Arinola Araba

- 5 Steps to get you out of debt, a project with the BBC
- Blog Wave

Contact information:

<http://www.bmoneywise.co.uk> (business)

<http://arinola.com> (personal)



Photo credit: Daura G London – November 2018

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