

UCOM
COMMUNICATOR
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Meet
Elizabeth!



Finding Joy in the Journey

by BettyBeth Johns,
Workforce Development Director

Elizabeth glides through her day, chatting with everyone who crosses her path. Smiling and singing and asking questions about everything from why some people are always ‘tigers’ (crabby) to what sort of food people eat. She is a preacher, singer, mother, student and, most impressively, a survivor. Life has not been easy or kind for Elizabeth, yet she leans on ‘her Jesus’ to guide her to the people and places that help her find her way.

Recently, UCOM became part of that journey and she recalls with great delight the dream she had about finding “the place you will work where there is food and good people.” From the first day she walked through the doors at UCOM, Elizabeth says she felt welcomed and empowered to continue her learning and serving. It has not always been so.



Fifteen years ago, Elizabeth was in a desperate place – a camp in Uganda without food or work or clean living conditions. And that was an improvement over the tortured adolescence she had experienced prior to arriving at the camp. She began working full time at age eight, was married off at age 13 and became a mother at age 15. The daughter of a wealthy restaurateur, she was twice kidnapped and taken multiple times by soldiers who raided villages and pillaged innocence and hope.

Abandoned by her first husband, Elizabeth, her younger sister and her small son found hope with a new husband – a family who promised to help Elizabeth get to America to find a better life. Against the wishes of her own family and community, who felt America was a terrible place of cruelty and domination, she immigrated to Minnesota in 2016 with her husband’s family.



In Minnesota, Elizabeth found hope in a faith community that recognized her gifts of teaching and preaching. She took care of the community's children and counseled young women who had been mistreated and abused and didn't understand their capability to self-determine a better life. Her independence did not suit her husband and soon she found herself once again on her own, now caring for her three small children.

Elizabeth has been in West Michigan for nearly four years, struggling to juggle the financial and social pressures of single motherhood, but reveling in the opportunities that are open to her. There is not a 'happy ending' so much as there is a message of JOY in the journey. Elizabeth has made mistakes; she has much to learn still about work and time management in American culture. But her children are healthy and happy and she is grateful for the time and talent that God has granted her.

Elizabeth is working with UCOM's Best Foot Forward program. She wants to find a job that will give her practice speaking English and will help contribute to her family's financial stability. She doesn't mind that the work might be hard or tiring. She has cleaned toilets, deboned chicken, and washed clothes. Every



experience, says Elizabeth, teaches her something she can use to help others.

When she is not working, mothering, volunteering or going to school, Elizabeth lives out her passion of singing and preaching. She has thousands of followers on her Nyiransaba Queen YouTube channel and she looks forward to the day when this passion blossoms into a full time vocation.

The seeds of HOPE are firmly planted in Elizabeth's spirit. UCOM walks alongside her – sowing more seeds and helping tend the growing capabilities that cultivate a meaningful life for Elizabeth and all those who are nurtured by the harvest of her heart.



YOU CAN HELP!

My Help, My Hope

by Elizabeth Nyiransaba

I am a very very strong woman. I know that with Jesus I am going to live in JOY and that my good life will come. Because of this program I can see my future. Before this program, I was blind. I could not see my future. I would pray, "My God, my God, help me" and being here at UCOM was my answer from God.

Things don't scare me now. I have overcome much difficulty and I know I can survive whatever else I must go through to get my message of HOPE back to Africa. ~

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