

Three Squeezes by Tanya

Every human being on earth faces storms in their lives. These storms, when they have passed, leave you a very strong person, or an empty shell of yourself.

It's like two houses, one built on rock and one built on sand. When the storms of life come, you either fall or stand firm.

In 1976, our family was hit by a very big storm.

My two brothers crossed the border into Mozambique to fight in the Liberation war. It was instant gaol if it was discovered that your children had gone to fight. Not gaol as in ordinary gaol, but hell. You would be tortured - sometimes maimed - and the whole family would be persecuted.

When my brothers went away, it was a closely kept secret. Only the nuclear family knew and no one else.

My father had type one diabetes and the prospect of never seeing his sons alive again made him lose a quarter of his body weight in just one week. We could hardly recognise him.

Our house became deathly quiet. My father barely slept, and so my younger sisters and I would tip-toe when walking for fear of waking him.

Around dawn, I would wake up to sounds of my father and mother praying; kneeling beside my brothers' beds.

With each day that passed, we grew closer and closer to God and it was very humbling seeing my parents cry so much.

One day, our parents called us in and told us everything was all right. They told us how much they loved us and held our hands, squeezing them three times in a gesture that told us they loved us so much.

Those three squeezes kept our family afloat over that very difficult period of our lives.

One night, a couple of years later, my youngest brother appeared at the door, out of the blue. He was so frail we could only feed him milk for three days. He couldn't go to hospital because the doctors would ask too many questions. We could only treat him at home.

And then, after the war, my eldest brother returned also. My father held him close and for two weeks didn't let him leave his side.

With my two brothers back home, our house was filled with laughter. I took both of their hands in mine, held tight, and gave them three squeezes.