

NAMUSISI LOST UTERUS, NOW

LIFE STORY

After her wedding, Lydia Namusisi planned to bear as many children as her womb could carry. Little did she know that she would stop at one baby. This is after a quack doctor shattered her uterus and colon, leaving her for dead. But to keep her dream alive, Namusisi and her husband have since adopted 11 children. She shared her story with **RITAH MUKASA**

Lydia Namusisi, 38, wears many hats as a primary school teacher, church minister, mother of 12 children and wife of Emmanuel Steven, a teacher and pastor from South Sudan. The couple lives in Omugo refugee camp in Terego district. They head Omugo Calvary Chapel, where they pastor over 170 adult refugees and 200 children. Namusisi calls her husband her best friend and a great pillar in her life. He has stood by her side through thick and thin. However, to get where they are, Namusisi says they endured life-threatening trials and tribulations, including losing her uterus. She has also braved rejection from her in-laws, but she is grateful to God for His mercies.

WHERE HER STORY BEGAN
After her O'level at Kyotera High School in Kyotera district, in 2000, Namusisi looked for bursaries for A'level in vain. She wanted to complete school, but had no one to help her. Her parents had long died and her relatives attempted to marry her off at 12 years. When she refused, they disowned her. She was lucky to have studied on a bursary for her O'level in Kyotera district, where she had gone to live



The couple with Bob Mayonza, the Pilgrim Centre for Reconciliation Uganda country director (left), whose retreats saved their marriage

with her maternal grandmother. The school did not have A'level. So, she went back to her family home in Luwero district after O'level. In 2001, Namusisi attended a week-long crusade organised by Yesu Akwagala Church, which is under the Uganda Christian Outreach Ministries (UCOM). Lady Luck smiled her way when one of the preachers offered her a scholarship to UCOM Bible College for four years. While there, Namusisi warmed up to David Easterly, a missionary from the US. In 2009, Namusisi accompanied Easterly on a mission to South Sudan, where she lived for a year while working at a mission school in Morobo county. During the course of her work, Namusisi realised there was a shortage of teachers. This pushed her back to Uganda, straight to Gaba Primary Teachers College, where she pursued a grade three certificate in primary teaching. Upon graduation in 2012, she returned to Morobo as a volunteer teacher. "Life was tough," she says. The county was mired in problems ranging from food scarcity to wide insecurity. Few professionals would accept to volunteer in such a volatile environment. Namusisi dared. Her sacrifice paid off. A year later, she met her husband, Emmanuel Steven. Being a renowned football coach in the province, Emmanuel was hired to train pupils at Alpha Nursery and Primary School, where Namusisi worked. But it never

occurred to both of them that they would end up getting married. The odds were high. Firstly, Emmanuel was a staunch Muslim. He was also South Sudanese. Two lines Namusisi could not cross, her being a Ugandan and staunch Born-Again Christian. She had prayed to God for a loving and God-fearing husband whom she would serve with her entire life. "Never did I ever dream of getting married to a Muslim," she says. Additionally, Emmanuel had an ugly past fraught with drugs and alcohol addiction. However, destiny had its own plans. The duo first became friends and before they knew it, Emmanuel started attending church. From that, it was just a matter of time before he converted to Christianity. The conversion, coupled with his humble disposition, softened Namusisi's heart. In February 2014, the couple exchanged vows amidst protest from Emmanuel's family. Some shunned the wedding, saying it was 'haram' or forbidden by Islam.

FACING REJECTION
After their honeymoon, the cultural shocks set in. Namusisi's in-laws demanded that she move into her

father-in-law's home as their culture dictates. She refused, saying it is a taboo in her Kiganda culture. Her husband took the parents' side; becoming physically and emotionally abusive. Namusisi's elder brother travelled to South Sudan to rescue his sister in vain. "My brother pleaded with me to leave the marriage, but I refused," she says. Even when the beatings intensified, Namusisi found all reason to cling on, all in the name of saving her marriage. Namusisi had conceived shortly after the wedding, but at six months, she suffered complications. "Thank God we were near a good hospital and my baby was saved," she says. Namusisi partly blames it on the stress she was going through at the time. Fast forward to 2016, war broke out in Morobo, forcing Namusisi and her husband to flee to Uganda, where they were hosted by Bishop Robert Kasozi in Soroti district. That year, Namusisi conceived, but miscarried at five months, owing to what the doctors called cervical incompetence.

Few months later, she conceived again and at two months, she consulted a doctor at a private facility, who recommended that she get stitched to prevent the baby from coming out. She would later learn that the doctor was a quack. **NAMUSISI NARRATES**
After examining me, that doctor assured me that the foetus was fine. He went on to do what he called 'stitching' to keep it inside. But after two days, I felt a big force pushing down my lower abdomen. I rushed to the hospital and that same doctor told me the foetus was coming out, but it could be stopped. He quickly hung me in what he called a 90 degrees position; legs up and head down. He said it would help to push back the baby. I was in immense pain, but I persevered because I was desperate to save my baby. I also thought it would take a few minutes, but I was wrong. I waited for hours for the doctor to release me in vain. From 10:30am to about 6:00pm. I was starving, but also bleeding. My husband looked for the doctor and he found him playing football, saying he had forgotten about me. By the time he came at about 7:00pm, I was drenched in blood and in excruciating pain. My health was deteriorating. I felt like life was being sucked out of me. I could see the doctor panic. He quickly wheeled me to the theatre promising to "finish what he had started." About three hours later, I was wheeled back into the ward, but the bleeding and pain increased

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MOTHERS 12 CHILDREN

instead. My body was also swelling. With tears streaming down his face, my husband asked the doctor to refer me to a bigger hospital, but he disappeared, leaving us helpless.

Fortunately, a visiting gynaecologist intervened. He made frantic calls to a bigger hospital while putting me in an ambulance. Everything was done hastily. The doctor kept on saying: "I had a few minutes to live."

He also followed me to the theatre where I found a team of doctors waiting for me. At that time, I was like an inflated balloon. My body had swollen to a point where my husband feared I would explode.

Long story short; the doctors tried all that was within their means to save my life. God bless those doctors. They told my husband I had slim chances of surviving. The damage was severe. I went into

a coma for four days and when I regained consciousness, they told me they had removed my uterus because it had been damaged badly. The quack doctor had cut it several times. He also cut part of my large intestine and that my stomach was filled with blood and faeces, because it had swollen like a balloon.

I escaped death by a whisker, but my woes were far from over. I stayed in the hospital for two months. My intestine was out and the doctors

kept cleaning inside my stomach to clear an infection. My lungs also hurt. I was told the 90 degrees position affected them and water had collected inside. I could not do anything by myself but thankfully, my husband was by my side.

I struggled to eat and braved the discomfort of colostomy bags. Drugs were also very expensive. I remember one I had to take three times a day, but each bottle cost sh300,000. I needed sh900,000 every day minus maintenance. Thankfully, my mission stood with me.

Back home, I continued using colostomy bags for nine months. We heard the quack doctor was sacked from the hospital.

WHO IS NAMUSISI?

Lydia Namusisi was born in Bakijjulula village in Luwero district to Florence Nantume, now deceased, and Mukasa Bbira, who was a prominent businessman.

She attended Kyotera Primary School and Sikannusu Primary School in Luwero district. In 1997, she joined Kyotera High School. Thereafter, she joined Gaba Primary Teachers College.



Namusisi

What others say

EMMANUEL STEVEN, NAMUSISI'S HUSBAND

Reconciliation saved my marriage. It was on a rough patch and I had made up my mind to abandon my wife after she lost her uterus, but that does not matter to me anymore. God has given us 11 beautiful children. We have since helped many couples to reconcile.

BOB MAYONZA, PILGRIM CENTRE FOR RECONCILIATION UGANDA COUNTRY DIRECTOR

Namusisi and Emmanuel are an inspirational couple. They are testimony that marriage should be hinged on love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Marriage can be turbulent, but once there is forgiveness, nothing can shake it.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

One day, while on my sick bed, my in-laws stormed my home to throw me out. They hurled insults at me, calling me demeaning names. "Our son must get a young wife to give him children," they screamed. My husband joined them. Days later, he packed to leave, saying he was not ready to live with a barren woman. He broke our wedding pictures and deleted all videos and photos of us together from his computer. I was devastated. I cried and prayed in vain.

However, before he could leave, we were invited for a reconciliation retreat organised by the Pilgrim Centre for Reconciliation Uganda. That was our turning point. There were many couples. They taught us a lot about forgiveness. We prayed for each other and in the process, we healed. My husband looked back in my eyes with love and mercy to date. We have since achieved a lot together and have adopted 11 abandoned children.

To the troubled couples; trust in God and prioritise forgiveness and reconciliation.