

NDEGE MODESTA MANDERE

When sickness strikes in a home, it forces a family to look at things from a new different perspective. And when things go wrong as it did with Modesta, the quality of life suffers. In Kenya, poor health robs a person of their soul and often leaves them destitute. It is true as well that poverty and access to healthcare seldom travel together.

Modesta first took ill in 1976. What started as a simple fatigue in her right leg progressively became worse. She experienced acute pain during her normal routine of waking up early in the morning to milk her cows, sending her children to school, and then working around her shamba. As time went by she felt that her leg was deteriorating. One morning she could barely move with a swollen knee twice its normal size. Her husband took her to the Kisii government hospital where the fluid was drained and she was allowed to go home the same day. Modesta described this as a painful process. Unfortunately, this procedure happened more frequently and there was no improvement. She was advised to visit a different hospital for a second opinion.

The treatment she received at Tabaka Mission Hospital allowed her to resume her normal activities. She was cautioned not to jump, carry or lift heavy objects. Finally, she received a shot of steroid drug to lower her swelling, and relieve pressure and pain. Her mobility improved for a while but later on the symptoms reoccurred.

This time the pain was worse than ever, it felt like a sharp needle every time she moved. She was not sleeping. Modesta could feel her life slipping away. She described it as having a body not belonging to her. After several trips to Tabaka and having no resources to keep visiting her doctor, she decided to seek medical treatment from a nearby clinic. There she discovered that she had developed asthma. As the situation kept on worsening, she hopped from one clinic to another. By 2015 she was completely paralysed. So her life was totally reduced to scratching for a living. She could not walk anymore. Without someone to drive her she was bedridden and housebound. She could not afford even a wheelbarrow to bring her in and out of her house.

Some of the photos you now see show Modesta sitting in an armless chair and carried in and out of the house like a new born baby. When it rains she will be soaked as there is no one to bring her back to the house. Should a fire break out, there is none who can save her from a tragic death. If she becomes tired and sleepy she will simply fall to the ground.

I got to know about Modesta's deteriorating status through my father. Being a church leader, he wondered why she no longer attended Sunday mass. He and a few friends went to her home to enquire about her welfare. They discovered her motionless, unable to move about.

Now that she has a wheelchair she can attend the market, visit friends, go to her nearby church, and live a better life. She lives about one kilometre from my home place.

She is married to Ndege Bosire and they both have 4 children together who are alive and several grand kids and one son died some few years ago. However, their four children live close by and there is always one around to assist the mother.

The day I delivered a new wheelchair to Modesta was a joyful one. The family was very happy and Modesta was so grateful. The gift of mobility cannot be taken for granted. Assistive devices like crutches are helpful; but in this case, Modesta needed more. The wheelchair has changed her life; she is being restored and has become a new person. As you can see now, Modesta is wearing a big

smile and has a wheelchair with brakes and arms to support her. She no longer feels helpless as a new born baby because she has not to be carried anymore like before.

I am sending a word of many thanks and appreciations to you my friends in Canada for you have seen the need of supporting the immobile people in my country. Christmas is a good time to say thanks and to let donors know that the funds raised are being put to good use. Please know that I first visit people in their homes to interview them and to find out more about their daily routines. I need to be assured that the wheelchair will be used only by that person and not given or sold to another. I follow up every six months to see how the person is doing. During the past two years, I have had the joy of providing wheelchairs and crutches to a dozen physically challenged people. Beginning in 2020 there are already four needy cases I am aware of that will see us connect people and wheelchairs.

Merry Christmas and many thanks for all the support you have given to make the wheelchair project possible.

Patricia Makori