



I'M NOT BAD, I'M A PERSON

Fundile Jonghlathi, 53

I've slept outside for many years. If you're working people give you dignity, but if you're not working there's no dignity. I have a son and a daughter and it makes me heartsore that I no longer know what they look like.

My family don't know I sleep on the streets. I don't have friends and I don't trust anybody. I sleep in the dark places, but the *tsotsis* come for you. You can never sleep deeply. You are always on the look out.

Sometimes I want to help people carry their bags, but people don't trust me because I'm dirty. They think I'm stupid. Sometimes I get lice. When I see them on my body, my heart doesn't feel right. But I'm not bad. I'm a person.

I go to churches for prayer and food and because I trust Jesus. Perhaps tomorrow God will give me something.



MY SON SAID TO ME, 'YOU'RE KILLING OUR MOM'

Lyn Rosario, 52

My mom was my best friend, but while I was on drugs I knew she was scared of me.

Because of my habit – coke, acid, *dagga* – I lived on the streets and slept on cold stairs for 15 years. I begged at robots during the day.

I quit for a few reasons: My mother's motivation, her perseverance, her standing behind me. She died three years ago of heartbreak after my brother died overseas. We couldn't get his body back.

There was a woman named Penny who drove past me every day. She had such a good heart. One day she gave me a big bag of groceries and money. That someone would give me this, that she could look on me as a human being, as if I deserved respect, made me feel so wanted.

The third reason was my son. One day he looked at me and said, 'You're killing our mom'.

I couldn't get his words or the look on his face out of my head. I went cold turkey. It was scary and it was painful, but I did it. If I can, anyone can.

Now? Now I get to take a bath every morning. I live on a farm with fresh air, green trees and secret hopes.



IT'S HARD TO SAVE MONEY BECAUSE THE OLDER GUYS COME AND SEARCH US

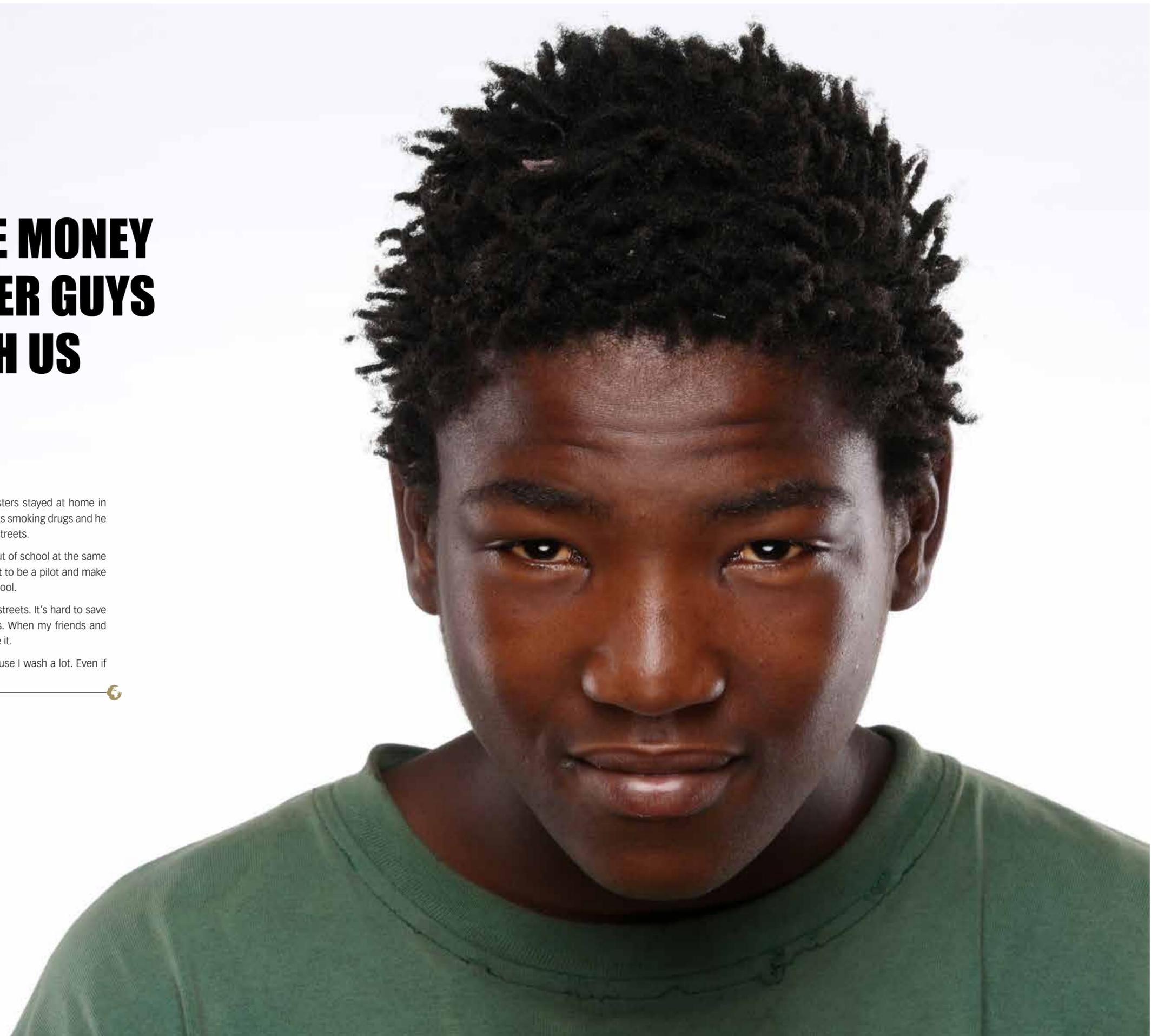
Luthando Ncayo, 17

My mother and father died when I was little. My sisters stayed at home in Mthatha and I went to live with my brother. But he was smoking drugs and he would abuse me, so I left. It was better to be on the streets.

That was two years ago, when I was 15. I dropped out of school at the same time but I miss it. I must go to school because I want to be a pilot and make lots of money. It's a dream I've had since primary school.

For now, my plan for the future is just to get off the streets. It's hard to save money because the older guys come and search us. When my friends and I get money, we have to hide it well or they'll just take it.

When I beg, people don't look at me too badly because I wash a lot. Even if I wear bad clothes, at least I'm clean.





I WANT A RANGE ROVER – ANY COLOUR

Knowledge Zondi, 42

I stay in a shelter but I have two cherries. One is at home in Pietermaritzburg and one is in Joburg. I want to marry them both and live in a house in Sandton or Soweto with electricity and a flushing toilet. I want a Range Rover – any colour – and a smaller car, maybe a black Mercedes.





I MISS MY CHILD

Adelaide Mabusela, 26

I fell pregnant when I was 16, and I dropped out of school in Grade 7. My daughter is 10 and stays with my mother in Limpopo because my life is not good.

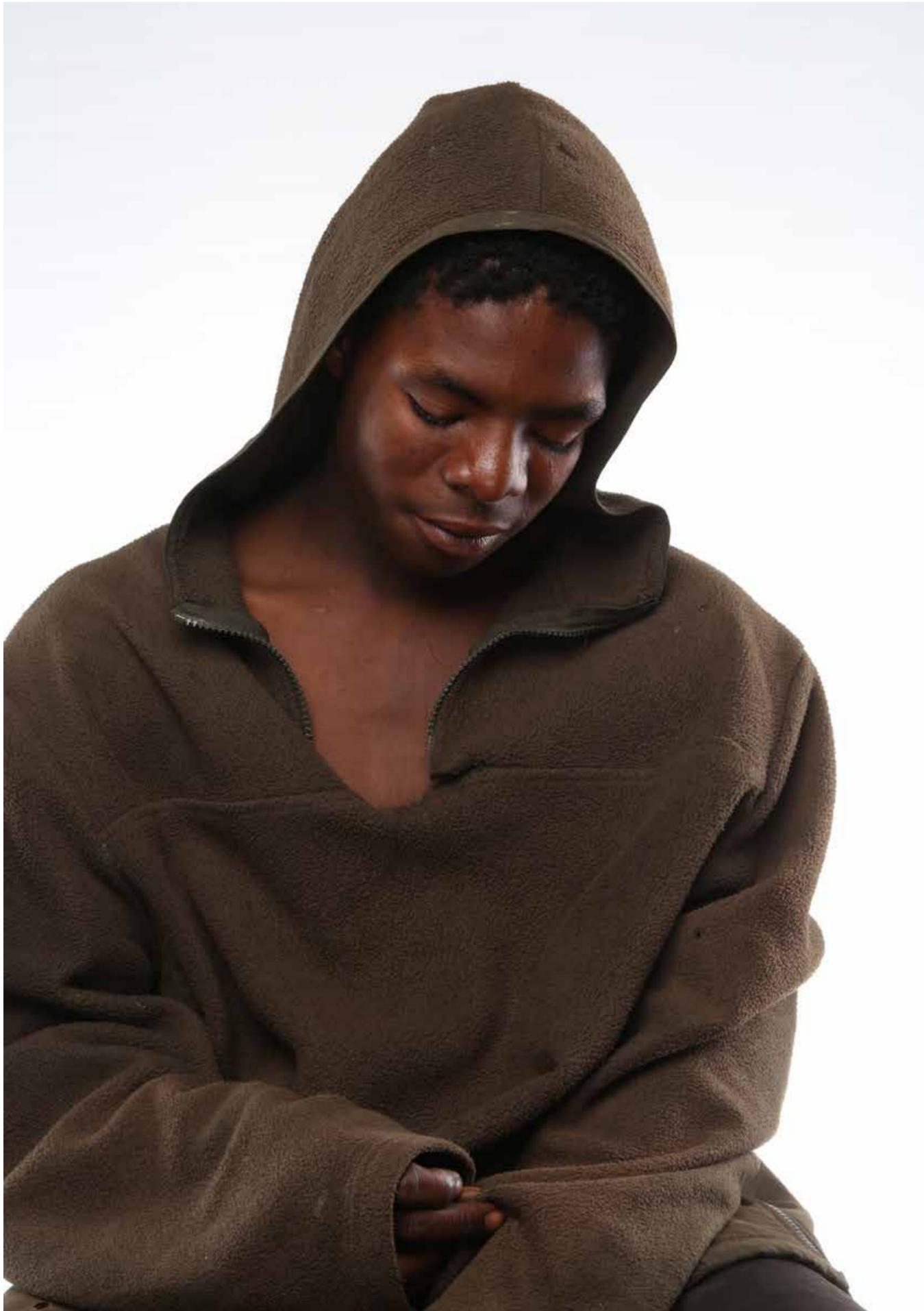
I stay in a homeless shelter in Pretoria West and sell my body. When I make money, I smoke it.

I miss my child. I last saw her five months ago.

I'm looking for work. I like arts and culture. I know how to clean and wash and garden. I taught myself. I just need help or advice. I don't have any money. I want to get my life back.

And I want God to forgive me.





I JUST CARRY ON LOOKING FOR FOOD

Luvuyo Nkolonzi, 17

I no longer have a mother, only a father. I stayed with an aunt for a while and I got here, on the streets, because of her. She wouldn't buy me any clothing or anything I wanted but her children always got what they wanted from her.

Around the middle of last year I stopped going to school, and I wouldn't go back now if I could. I still have contact with my friends and family – when they come to town they buy food for me.

I would like to change my life but I don't know how.

It's difficult on the streets. Every day I wake up, go hustle for food and then I eat. I ask for change from people, but most times they say they don't have. I don't care what they think of me, I just carry on looking for food.





PEOPLE BUY NUTS FOR THE SQUIRRELS

Felix Chughuda, 46

I sleep at a shelter in Cape Town but I leave early every morning because I know why I'm here, on the street. I want to do this music thing.

I busk every day at the Gardens in town. I sit in the sun every day, or in the rain every day. I am a man and I'm not scared of the rain and cold.

I lived with friends in Sea Point for two years, but I moved to the street for my music. I play guitar and drums. I play hip hop, R&B, a mix. I play everything.

I left my home in Tanzania in 2011 and I have worked as a chef in five countries. If I wanted money, I could go back to that.

I make my necklaces but I don't sell them. If I make them to sell, my point of coming to the streets will be lost.

When I started on the street it was horrible. Once someone came at me with a knife while I was sleeping, but I fought him off. God was with me.

I often think about going home, but I have to finish my album first. It's easier to make an album here – there are many studios.

People always take photos of me. What's shocking is that people will buy nuts for the squirrels so they can take a photo. Imagine if everyone gave me just cents when they took a photo of me. I could make R40 every day. But they don't, they just walk away.

I have to remember I am here for my music. I am not selling my body. I'm not a model. I'm a musician.

IF I HAVE TO BE A HOBO, I'M GOING TO BE THE CLEANEST HOBO ON THE STREET

Ronel Scholtz, 21

I was eight months pregnant when he threw me down the stairs. I lost my baby.

I said to him: 'You can lock the doors and bolt the windows, but the Lord is going to help me get out.' One day, last June, he forgot to close the bathroom window, so I jumped out and left Port Elizabeth for Joburg.

I didn't know where to go.

A lot of Nigerians offered me drugs but I would rather live on the street than be a prostitute.

I had a friend who got into prostitution. And now, every day, she is high, high, high...

I slept next to some boys one night, and the next morning all my things were gone. They nearly raped me – I still have the marks. They knocked out my tooth.

I was eight when my mother died. Since then I've been alone. I've tried to kill myself three times. Once I stabbed a hole in my leg so I could bleed to death. I wanted to go where she is.

When I can, I send my dad money. I call him and say, 'Daddy, go fetch the money at the supermarket'.

Living on the street is very tough, but the government is good to us. They give us a place to wash.

I said to myself: 'If I have to be a hobo, I'm going to be the cleanest hobo on the street!' You would never say I live on the streets.





I'M STUCK HERE

Siyabonga Bhengu, 25

I sleep under the bridge in Nugget Street in the Johannesburg CBD. I eat from dustbins and sometimes I get food at a church. My papers with all my relatives' contact details were ruined in a huge storm. I'm stuck here. I want to go home to Ladysmith but I don't have the R200 for transport.





THE MORE I SEE ABOUT PEOPLE, THE MORE I LOVE ANIMALS

Bokkie Müller, 79

Five years ago I was living in a house in Benoni. I had money in the bank – about R300 000. My mother had left me quite well off. When a friend of my brother's begged me to sign surety for his daughter's medical expenses – she had a tumour on the brain – I felt too sorry to say 'no'.

But he disappeared overseas and the bank wanted their money. They took it all. It was R300 000 down the drain. I think if I had more, they would have taken more. I lost everything. I didn't know what to do. I was falling around. The lawyer said: 'Even if they find him, if he offers to pay you back R100 a month, you'll have to accept it.'

Friends dropped me – I think they thought I would come to them for help, but I never turned to them.

I hated myself. I felt so insecure. How could I be so bladdy stupid? I hardly slept at night because I didn't know what was going to happen the next day.

My partner of 35 years, Eileen, died in 2001. If she'd been alive, I know she would have made me say 'no'. But I can't blame anyone else. I can't really even blame myself – when someone says their child is ill, you don't think too hard.

I moved into a shelter and, slowly, I had to learn to forgive myself. I realised there was no use crying over spilt milk.

Today I'd advise anyone to think twice before they do anything as far as money is concerned. It makes no difference if it's R1 000 or R1-million – it is still money.

I have made peace with myself but I don't trust anymore. The more I see about people, the more I love animals.

In the end, the child died anyway. It was money down the drain.



I WANT TO BE A DOCTOR BUT I'M A SEX WORKER

Dineo Mkhazazi, 26

I want to be a doctor but I'm a sex worker. Some clients are good to me. Others take their money back afterwards and run away. I don't have any friends. Nobody loves me.



PEOPLE TRY TO BE NICE

Olwethu Bopy, 17

When I was little I wanted to be a soldier.

My grandmother used to work as a domestic helper, but now nobody at home works so I hustle by begging in the wealthy suburbs where it's easy to get money from white people.

I can make up to R80, and when I'm lucky I can hustle R100. That's because people try to be nice.

