

TELL YOUR STORY

A refugee story of faith
and hope, told in words
and art.

Lope's Story



Tell Your Story celebrates the journey of participants from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) refugee backgrounds – including those currently seeking asylum. The aim is to both encourage hope and healing in participants, and to inspire faith, hope and understanding in others.

With training provided by experienced Salvation Army coaches, and with prompts/ questions provided, participants (looking through the lens of faith) use both their words and art forms to tell their stories. These are shared online and in booklet form.

My story – Lope

I come from Marshall Lagoon, in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and my journey has taken me from a small village in Papua New Guinea to a new life in Australia. Through many hard times and good, God has been my refuge and strength.

I was born into a Christian household of eight siblings. My parents were subsistence farmers, and we lived in a village in a rural area. Our house was built over water and the only means of transportation was by paddling a canoe or by driving a dingy powered by a 25hp Johnson outboard motor.

We would paddle to our vegetable gardens then walk through the mangroves before reaching our gardens on land. We grew vegetables like yams, sweet potatoes, bananas, cassava and taro, to name a few. We fetched water, for everyday use, from Lako River, which took about two hours, round trip. I also paddled a canoe to school. I temporarily



Left: This is Koki Wanigela Village, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. This place means a lot to me because my life started to blossom here after I left my village. This is where my first grandchild was born and also where I last spent time with my family members before moving to Australia. I have very fond memories of this place.

lived with my uncle and aunt, so I could walk to school during the stormy times of the year.

Success through challenges

My father passed away when I was about eight years old. My mother and my older siblings brought me up. Although life was very tough, I enjoyed my childhood. My mother loved God and was very prayerful. She took great care of me and my youngest sister.

I started attending school at the age of seven and at 17, I was in Port Moresby Secretarial College. A year later, I graduated from Lae Technical College, as a Stenographer. I studied diligently

so that I could start working and take care of my mother and repay her for all that she did for me.

I worked in various law firms and organisations in Port Moresby and other parts of the country. I also served as court stenographer and legal secretary to the first female judge in the South Pacific.

An uncertain future

While working in Mount Hagen, I got married and had my daughter. When my daughter was three years old, I was diagnosed with an illness and couldn't have any more children. When my daughter was 10 years old, we adopted



our son from my best friend, who later passed away. We moved to Rabaul and started a service station.

My marriage didn't work out, so I returned to Port Moresby to care for my mother who was not well. She passed away in 2005. I loved her dearly and was broken-hearted when she died. This was a difficult time for me, but I found comfort in God's Word and emotional support from my family.

In 2008, I met my late partner, who was from the Highlands Region of PNG. After he passed away, I was subjected to ill-treatment, humiliation, and death threats linked to his status. Most of my friends abandoned me. I was alone and sad but often prayed and listened to gospel songs. My favourite song was *Only Jesus can satisfy your soul*. This song, along with praying and fasting, gave me so much peace.

Giving over to God

I sought protection from Australia. My initial Protection (refugee) Visa application lodged by a migration lawyer was rejected. The lawyer said I didn't stand a chance of winning appeal. I had hope in God and appealed the decision myself. I had to live off my savings during this process, but God helped me manage my finances. In 2019, my appeal was successful, and I was granted a Protection Visa. God is amazing! To those in a similar situation to mine, I encourage you to keep trusting God to take care of you.



I was subjected to ill-treatment, humiliation, and death threats... I was alone and sad but often prayed and listened to gospel songs.

I struggled with feelings of hatred and resentment, and it was like being in prison. But I knew that I had to forgive. I was led by God to forgive everyone who tried to harm and reject me. I put my grievances in God's hands. I fully surrendered to God to take control of my life, and he turned my life around.

I started volunteering at a Salvation Army Family Store. I prayed for a job and told the store manager that I needed a job. In 2020, I got a job as a shop supervisor. The store manager often invited me to events in the community and at the Cairns Corps. I thanked this amazing woman for her effective leadership in the community and caring for people like me. I call her “boss meri”, which is PNG Pidgin language for “boss lady”.

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Life in God

I felt a sense of belonging with The Salvation Army. I started attending Cairns Corps church services and became a worship team member. I was nominated to be a church leader in 2022 and became a Salvation Army soldier in 2023.

To date, I have a granddaughter and two grandsons.

If it were not for God’s presence in my life, I don’t know where I’d be today. I see miracles and blessings unfold in my life. I believe God has a plan for me. I rest on God’s promise that I should not fear, for he is with me; I should not be afraid for he is my God. He will strengthen me. He will help me and certainly take hold of me with his hand of justice, power, victory and salvation.



Left: A road going through a typical suburb in Cairns



Inspiration from the Bible

Hagar is a woman in the book of Genesis who was an Egyptian slave. Originally, she 'belonged' to the Pharaoh, and then was 'given' to Abraham and Sarah when they left Egypt. Though our circumstances were different, like Hagar, I was forced to leave my home and seek refuge elsewhere.

She was forced to migrate with her master.

Like Hagar, I had a tough life. My parents were subsistence farmers. We farmed vegetables and sometimes had mangrove beans and caught fish from

the river. It was very hard work, and we had to labour manually. We didn't have much money.

I had to leave PNG to seek refuge in Australia because of mistreatment. Having experienced this, I can imagine that Hagar was scared when she was given to Abraham and Sarah. She didn't want to be there.

As the years passed, her mistress, Sarah, grew old and was barren. One day, Sarah brought Hagar to Abraham to have a child with her. Abraham obeyed her, and Hagar conceived. Hagar must have had a horrible feeling because she was forced to have a child with Abraham.

Hagar and Sarah became enemies. Hagar, now with child, despised Sarah, and Sarah became emotional and envious, and started mistreating her. Meanwhile, Abraham had little interest in the unborn child or Hagar and kept treating Sarah well while ignoring the abuse.

I experienced hardship, mistreatment and rejection like Hagar, and I trusted God and had hope in him.

Trying to escape a hard life

Hagar found her miserable life unbearable and fled to the desert where she encountered the angel of the Lord near a spring. She told the angel that she was running away from her mistress because she mistreated her. The angel told her to return to Sarah and do what she asks her to do. The angel stressed that the Lord heard of her misery and that her descendants would be too many to count.

Although Hagar experienced hardship, mistreatment and rejection, she trusted God, had hope in him and had the courage to move on.

Hagar experienced God's presence

and knew God was always with her. She found comfort in him, knowing that he could hear and see what was happening in her life. God was always with Hagar, like me. I believe there was divine intervention and direction in both Hagar's and my own story. God led and guided us through our circumstances.

Hagar had faith in God, obeyed the angel and returned to Sarah. She knew that God gave her strength in the wilderness and protected her so she would be safe from harm when she returned to Sarah. She was obedient and forgiving.

Hagar remembered how God rescued her and told God that he was the God who saw her. She believed that God had a plan for her.

Sarah continued to treat Hagar unfairly. One day she watched Hagar's son, Ishmael, and thought that he was mocking Isaac, her son. Sarah was angry and told Abraham to get rid of the slave woman and his son so he wouldn't share inheritance with Isaac.





God's good plans

Abraham didn't want to send him away, but God told him to do so. So, Hagar and Ishmael left. But they ran out of food and water in the desert. God heard Ishmael crying of thirst and he provided them with water. God had plans for Ishmael and promised Hagar that he would become a great nation.

God gave me wisdom to manage my finances well and I survived off my savings before I got my visa. God provided for my needs like he did to Hagar and her son.

I believe God has a plan for me like Hagar. It's not an accident that I am working with The Salvation Army. I know the good Lord will keep leading me and I will continue to serve him. I rest in God's promise in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. 'Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future'."

Above: Illustration of Hagar and Ishmael in desert running out of water and saved by God's providing a well, Book of Genesis

“FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU,’ DECLARES THE LORD. ‘PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE AND FUTURE’”

My story through cards

Card storytelling is an activity where participants use image cards to represent and share their life story.

Life is not all sunshine. If you want your life to be beautiful like a rainbow, you need to trust the Holy Spirit to guide you, lead you and control your life.



My story through clay

This is an image in clay that represents 'space'.

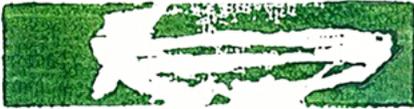
The rainbow fruit doughnut resembles Jesus' love through struggles and hardship.

Like a doughnut, if there is no space, there is no doughnut.

Even though we struggle and go through hardship, God's love surrounds our emptiness and loneliness.

We grow closer to God and God's presence.

God can make our lives beautiful.



My story through stamps

Stamp storytelling is an activity where participants carve soft wood to create images that represent their life stories.

Jesus showed love on the cross. The canoe in the water is my means of transportation. House of God, man and the living word of God.



BELIEVE IN GOOD