DISABLED YET FULFILLED: A LASTING LOVE STORY

BY JULIET LUKWAGO

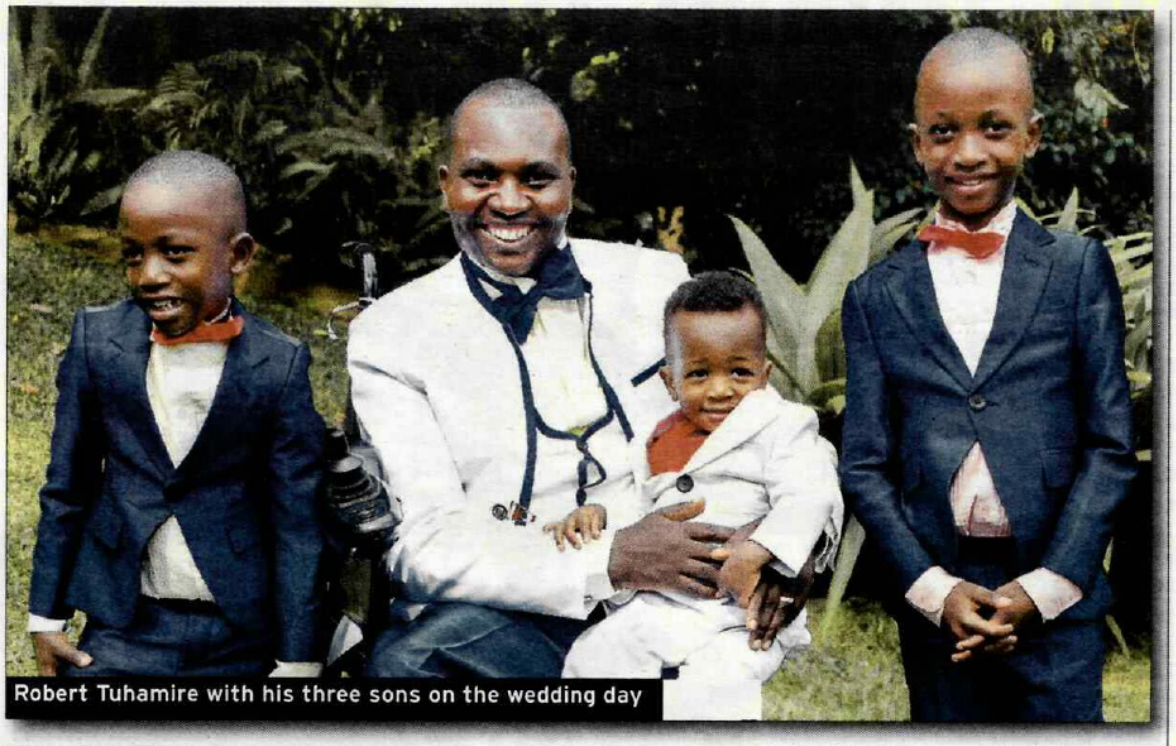
Disability is not a sin. It does not make you less capable than anyone else. People with disabilities can live happy and fulfilling lives just like everyone else. These words have guided Robert Tuhamire's life for decades.

Tuhamire, 46, lost the use of his legs after contracting polio at the age of one and a half. Today, he moves with the support of his hands and uses a wheelchair. But his disability did not stop him from building a career, pursuing education or raising a family.

Together with his wife, Anita Owomuhangi, 37, the couple has built a strong marriage and a family of six children, including twins.

"We do not need pity," Anita says firmly. "We are happy, and our marriage is strong."

The couple received Holy Matrimony on July 27, 2019, after living together for nine years.



Robert Tuhamire with his three sons on the wedding day

HOW THEY MET

The couple's love story began through a mutual friend, Anne Birungi (RIP), who was both Robert's cousin and Anita's friend.

Birungi first suggested the match in 2009 after observing Robert's character. At the time, Anita was still a student in Senior Five.

"She told me she had a good friend called Anita and that she thought she would make a good wife for me," Robert recalls.

Curious about the idea, Robert travelled with Birungi to visit Anita at school. He carried small gifts — bread, biscuits, cake and juice — hoping to see her during visiting hours.

However, Anita had travelled to another school in Ntungamo for a cultural conference. Robert left the gifts with her sisters and later drove to the conference venue just to greet her.

At the time, Robert earned about sh300,000 as his salary. Still, he gave Anita sh40,000 — all the money he had on him.

"It was the first time we spoke," he remembers.

The two stayed in touch while Robert waited for Anita to complete her A-Level studies in 2010.

ROBERT'S STORY

Robert was born to the late Francis Kinyamutuue and Keledonia Basuluka of Mitooma district. He is the seventh of 10 children.

At one and a half years old, he contracted polio. His parents took him to several hospitals, including Nyakibaale Hospital in Rukungiri, but treatment did not restore mobility.

Despite the challenge, Robert pursued education with determination.

He attended Rwagashai Primary School, Mitoma Primary School and Ruhinda Secondary School for both O and A Levels. Later he joined MUBS, where he obtained a diploma in business administration.

In 2007 he was employed at MUBS as a receptionist in the public relations office and later transferred to another department.

While working, he continued his studies and completed a bachelor of business administration in 2014, graduating in 2015.

He later pursued a master's degree in energy economics and governance.

"Disability does not mean inability," Robert says. "I know what I want and I work hard to achieve it."

In addition to his job, he also runs a poultry farm in Bushenyi with about 500 chickens.

ANITA'S PERSPECTIVE

Anita says she did not initially think about a relationship when Robert first expressed interest in her.

"It was not something I had in mind," she admits.

But her perception changed after she experienced his kindness and commitment.

After finishing Senior Six, Anita fell seriously ill. Her parents took her to several hospitals, but doctors could not identify the cause of her illness.

They later sought prayers at Karama Catholic Church and at Mount Zion Prayer Centre in Bukalango.

Throughout this period, Robert regularly travelled from Kampala to check on her.

"He encouraged me and told me everything would be fine," Anita says.

His support convinced her that he was the right partner.

"That is when I realised he was my Mr Right."

A LIFE TOGETHER

Anita says her husband has supported her education and personal development.

He paid her tuition as she pursued a certificate and later a diploma in business administration at MUBS, where she graduated with first-class honours.

Today she has completed her degree and is pursuing a master's degree.

"I am proud of my husband," she says. "Whatever I am today is partly because of his support."

FACING CRITICISM

Despite their happiness, the couple says they have often faced negative comments from people who question their relationship.

"Some people think our marriage is a joke," Anita says. "Others ask why I married a man with a disability."

But she says she ignores such remarks.

"I am not ashamed of my husband. I respect and love him."

Robert says the key to their success is mutual support and understanding.

"We are content with our life," he says.

SHARED LESSONS

The couple encourages others not to judge people with disabilities. "Disability should not be a reason to pity someone," Anita says. "People with disabilities deserve love, respect and opportunities like anyone else."

They also advise couples to work together and support each other.

"Marriage requires patience, friendship and hard work," Robert says. "When there is love and respect, a family becomes strong."

WHEN FAMILIES AGREED

After Anita completed school, Robert helped her find a job at Richard Studio in Capital Shoppers Nakawa, where she began training in photo editing.

Because Robert already knew Anita's parents, he informed them about the job opportunity. They agreed and allowed their daughter to move to Kampala. That is when their relationship began.

In 2011, Robert formally approached Anita's father and asked for permission to marry her.

"He told me he would first discuss it with the family and also ask Anita if she accepted," Robert says.

A few days later, Anita's father called back with good news – the family had agreed.

Their traditional introduction ceremony was held on July 16, 2011, at Anita's family home in Mitooma district.

More than 100 people accompanied Robert to the ceremony, including friends from Makerere University Business School (MUBS), Rotarians and relatives.

After the ceremony, Anita's parents officially allowed her to begin life with Robert.

The couple returned to Kampala and started their family. Their first child was born in September 2011, followed by another in March 2013. Today they have six children – four boys and two girls.

Although they had lived together for several years, the couple eventually formalised their union in church.

They wedded on July 27, 2019, at Our Lady of Africa Parish in Mbuya. The ceremony was officiated by Monsignor John Wynand Katende.

The reception was held at MUBS and attracted more than 700 guests.

"We were overwhelmed by the support from friends and family," Robert says.

Their wedding photos were taken at Sheraton Hotel Kampala.



Robert and his wife Anita, on their wedding day. For any marriage to grow, the couple advises that [illegible] patience, friendship and hard work from both partners