

I cut my political teeth at the university

Martha Wangari's clamour for change has seen her rise from student leader to a Nominated Senator

Q: What were you doing before you joined the Senate?

A: I was doing so many things and I like to call myself a "hustler". I started when I was in the university. I was involved in student leadership in my first year and was the finance secretary for the Organisation of Nairobi University Science Students (ONUSS) at Chiromo campus. In my second year, I rose to be the first female vice chair of the same union.

In third year, I was elected vice chairperson in charge of academics in the Student Organisation of Nairobi university (Sonu). This gave me exposure. I was later recruited into the Kibaki Tena secretariat under the Vijana na Kibaki. I then initiated the Waremba na Kibaki lobby to marshal young women.

In 2011 I joined a team of Kenyans interested in changing the country's politics. We formed the United Democratic Forum (UDF), which we registered as a society, and went around the country doing civic education on an array of issues especially on the devolved governance system. We later transformed it into a political party that nominated me to the Senate.

What's the one thing you bought with your first big earning?

I bought a 21-inch colour television for Sh21,000 using my first earning made from selling juice and groundnuts at the university. The irony later was that I didn't have a bed so I had to watch the TV from the mattress on the floor!

What went through your mind when you first met your husband? And where did you meet?

He was more of a friend even before



we were lovers. That friendship has remained to date. We met at some forums we were organising in 2008, dubbed the inter-ethnic forums, after the post-election violence. I remember borrowing his car to run an errand in Nakuru and without blinking he gave me the keys. I was asking myself how he could trust me yet we had not interacted much. As they say the rest is history. He is loving, can spoil me and is the best father to our baby.

How did you feel when you found out that you'd be a parent?

Let me say it was not really planned because it happened during the campaigns when I was all over the country. I got the baby in January and in March I was sworn-in to the Senate. The experience was good and challenging at the same time since I was determined to conform to the World Health Organisation stand-

ards of exclusive breastfeeding.

The challenges prompted me to successfully petition the Parliamentary Service Commission to support breastfeeding mothers in Parliament — both members and staff. I love each and every bit of parenting, including the sleepless nights!

How do you juggle between politics and family?

I have been lucky as my husband has been in politics even longer. He understands and takes my place when I am not around. Oh, and he is an amazing cook being a first born — I cannot compete!

And unless I'm away, Sundays are the days we take time to cook and hang out as a family. We sneak in as much time as possible — even if we get a two-hour break we enjoy each other's company.

When you have 30 minutes of free

time, how do you use it?

Not too long ago I loved watching TV and listening to music but that has changed. Depending on how far I am from my house I rush to see my baby or take the time to interact with my constituents on social media. I am active on Facebook and Twitter.

What is the most expensive gift anyone has ever given you?

A Samsung S5 that my husband bought for my 30th birthday last year. It's my mobile office.

Who inspires you the most?

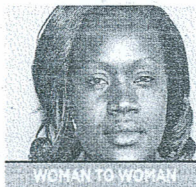
There are several. First is my mother. She raised my three brothers and I single-handedly, made sure we got an education, and even when she was struggling she never gave up. The other is my husband Peter, he is a Mr Fix It — nothing is too hard for him. When I'm stuck in anything I know who to call. He is also a super dad and won't shy away from changing diapers or singing lullabies to the baby. It makes my life bearable. I am a mother of one baby boy, Andrew, who is about 18 months old, and two young adults Francis, 22, and Mercy, 18, from my husband's previous relationship.

What has been the happiest moment of your life?

Looking at my baby's face after birth... no words can explain that feeling. I was so overwhelmed that I couldn't think.

What do you miss most about being a child?

The mischief! I grew up in the village, mostly among boys, so my games were really tomboyish and I enjoyed every bit. I got an injury once or twice but that was part of the game. Today's children miss out on the real thing.



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