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Foundations for Future Academic and Leadership Pursuits

The Role of Parents

Our parents brought us up well. Despite their very meagre earnings from farm produce, my father made every effort to pay for basics such as school fees, limited clothing, reading and writing materials. My elder brother, the late William Nyamwange, completed his teacher training course in the early 1950s. He assisted father in paying our school fees and other expenses. His siblings are forever grateful for the role he played. Nyamwange never finished any talk without stressing the importance of education. For those of us who performed well and joined government-supported schools, the fees were minimal.

I joined Kisii High School which was a boarding school where residential expenses were subsidized. Gusii customs dictate that young boys become men at some stage by going through an initiation ritual ceremony. Elaborate procedures of circumcision were performed on ten of us. This was an all-men affair to mark the passing of age from boyhood to manhood.

Twelve of us, all of the same age group, gathered in one hut where we were coached, told the importance of the ritual and taken across hills and valleys for circumcision. The coaching and vows were so critical at this early stage of between 12 and 16 years that no boy would miss this rite of passage. The process is important and necessary for the development of a boy to a man. I do not know of any boy who did not go through this important cultural passing ritual.

When the boys were paraded, the more experienced and elderly men would look for one brave boy to lead the rest. They would have known us earlier and determined who would lead the group. This was a serious procedure which had to succeed. The inductees had to be brave and the lead boy had to be brave too in order to encourage the rest. After several routine requirements, and having been in

cold waters in the very early hours of the morning, we were paraded, lying on the ground with our faces firmly stuck on the ground. I had been informed in advance that I would lead the group for the cut! I obliged.

The person who performed the cut used a special sharp knife and no anaesthesia was used. It was normally done at about 4 am to avoid excessive bleeding and fatigue. The story is that I led a group of twelve young boys to be initiated; anyone who attempts to run away or cry could be 'speared' to death or condemned culturally. The ceremony was a success and it brought joy to all initiates despite it being a very painful experience. Women, as earlier stated, were excluded from this affair but they brought porridge made from a cereal, *wimbi*, to be given to the young men who had bravely gone through initiation. Upon circumcision, we were declared men who could protect the nation and could sit at the periphery during men's meetings or gatherings. We were proud and confident.

My father taught us humility and respect. I remember on many occasions when we went for celebrations where food was provided. He would advise me not to queue, not to rush or stampede to the serving point. In case food ran out, we would go home and eat there.

He also told us to be cautious of great talkers. They could be liars. One never rushed to conclusions on important matters. One had to always do one's research.

He used to send me on his errands despite the many sons he had. The reason was that I never questioned him. I remember one time when he asked my elder brother, Tirimba, to go and guard/sleep at our community shop in Masimba. Tirimba refused and got a thorough beating. I had to go there even though it was not my turn that week.

I always believed in timely completion of a task. Assignments must meet deadlines at all costs. My father liked achievers and those that he could trust.

My father was an opinion leader, soft-spoken, and was involved in several village meetings. He was consulted by other elders on delicate issues like family and land disputes. I do not recall him being angry or picking a quarrel with the neighbours. All his brothers, my uncles, remained in Nyaura, but would occasionally come to visit us at Nyamagesa and spend some days with us. I recall one of my uncles, Mouti Okioga, who resembled my father and spoke softly like him.

One of my other uncles from my mother's side, Birari Achimba Nyamwange, deserves special mention. He was considered a healer, a herbalist and a fortune teller. Whenever he came home to visit, my father accorded him the highest and most respectful reception. I held him in the highest esteem for his healing prowess. Father regarded him so.

Whenever he came to Nyamagesa from his Taracha village, we knew we could have the best meals during his stay. A goat or sheep had to be slaughtered in his honour. We benefited from his visits. The rest of my mother's siblings were sisters. Visitors were a blessing to our house and were always welcome.

My father had one trait which was liked by many of his peers. He was a meticulous grass-thatcher. Many houses in Gusiiland in the 1950s and 1960s were grass-thatched and this was done by a gifted or trained thatcher. *Mzee* believed in quality and style of grass-thatching with the finest finishes. His competitor in the area was *Mzee* Thomas Ogotu. The rest of the thatchers were considered amateurs and whichever roofs they put up leaked.

Quality of thatching was measured by non-leaking roofs. Any drop of rain into the living or sitting rooms was considered a shoddy finish and the thatcher had to redo the leaking section. As a young boy, I used to hang around when roofing was being done. Special types of grass referred to in Ekegusii as *ekenyoru* (fine fescue) or *ekebabe* (*imperata cylindrica*), both of which are slowly disappearing, were used for thatching. The buildings by the *wazee* (old men) taught me the quality of finished products and the value of social interactions with the elders.

My father was always occupied, putting up roofs for neighbours. By the way, they did the work for no pay. They rotated from one homestead to another as need arose.

An interesting observation is that, even today, only men and not women in our community are involved in building houses. Culturally, a goat or cock was slaughtered on completion of one house and the builders enjoyed a sumptuous meal to celebrate the achievement. Gusii culture dictates that a cock should be slaughtered solely for the main person who has thatched the roof. He is like the lead architect.

My father used to enjoy this privilege, but always shared his traits with his peers. The final celebration is done after a special sharpened stick (*egechuria*) is strategically mounted at the tip of the house which signifies completion. This tradition has several cultural implications which I cannot explain here. The feasting after house completion compares favourably with the present-day house-warming, or opening a highway, a school, a church or a hospital. People celebrate these achievements.

Whenever I put up a new building, I do the same for the contractors, masons and carpenters. We slaughter a goat to celebrate the house's completion. Some people do spread the remains of goats' guts around the house and compound as a blessing. These traditions and beliefs still exist and allow for closer family ties as the people gather for the event. This is part of the blessings for a long life.

My father passed away on 12 October 1982 after a long illness. He had been treated in Kisii General Hospital before he was transferred to Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi. I remember making arrangements for his admission to the hospital. My younger brothers, Ameyna and Thomas, drove him to our house in Hurlingham, Nairobi, at about 3 am.

My wife Esther and I received him briefly and he found our first-born, Nyakundi, awake and suckling. He held him in his hands, spat saliva on his face and blessed him. This is the traditional way of wishing newly-born baby luck. Nyakundi was born on 11 March 1982.

This was the last time that he saw the young boy despite promising us that he would come back to our house and visit! We were devastated when he passed away. I recall that we (the sons) visited him in Kenyatta National Hospital. He told us that we must work as one family entity. Our family was very large and *Tata* (father) had many children and grandchildren. There was no need to cause differences amongst ourselves. He said he had brought us up well; we were then settled with our families and he asked us to respect each other. Let there be nobody who could cause any rift.

His burial ceremony was attended by people from all walks of life. We lost a father and a great advisor who loved all his children equally.

My mother possessed great knowledge on the identification of plants, and taught me especially those which had healing properties. She knew virtually every plant by its local name as well as its uses. Her brother, the mentioned uncle, was versed in plant identification for medicinal properties. Through my interaction with them, I came to know plants for colds, blood clots, eye treatment, stomach ailments, worms, malaria and diarrhoea. Whether they healed or not is still questionable when we compare them with western medicines.

However, current research in herbal medicine seems to affirm that many of these plants possess medicinal properties. What I came to know for sure was that some of the herbs mother prescribed worked. I occasionally administer them to my family, especially when we are in the rural areas, and they work. Currently, I teach courses in weed science and plant taxonomy and have found the early lessons from my mother very useful. I now know which plants may have medicinal properties despite classifying them as weeds.

My mother used to amaze me at times. She could get out and call passers-by for lunch or dinner in our house. She knew some people who were needy and needed a meal. Mother was regarded as a pillar in social and family matters in Nyamagesa Village. The young ladies who were married into our community consulted her for any social and domestic issues. She was so liked that the whole community paid great tributes during her funeral in February 1992.

When Mama Beldina Nyatero passed away, we were so devastated that we did not know whom to go to for advice. I recall my wife, Esther, and I driving all night to Kendu Mission Hospital to join the rest of the family where she passed away. The loss of a mother is devastating; we could already feel the vacuum in the family. We lost a village pillar whose name later spread by many families naming their siblings after her name as is customary to *Gusii* traditions. The children who were named after her are so special to me and I always remember her through them.

My mother taught us several survival tactics. She believed in hard work and getting up early to accomplish plans for the day. She believed in feeding us well to avoid being sick or being tempted to eat anywhere else and contracting germs. She entertained all sorts of people, both family members and distant relatives. Many

great scholars from Nyamagesa community who excelled in their careers passed through our home. They include Lawrence George Nyairo (a great teacher), the late Justice James Onyiego Nyarangi (mother's cousin) and several ladies who were married off from our home. They always remind me of my mother's generosity and loving care.

Among the many things that my parents taught me was the origin of Omogusii, names and their meanings, different types of animals and birds. All these were relayed to me in my mother tongue. My mother would name the twelve calendar months in Ekegusii. I cannot recall all of them now. However, I can name and specify the world compass in my local dialect. North is known as *Irianyi*, South is called *Sugusu*, East is *Mocha* and West *Bosongo*. The best way I remembered these was to coin Christian songs with directions or watch where the sun rose from the East and set in the West.

My mother was very good in short-term weather forecasting, especially when to receive rains. She relied on the noises made by insects and frogs to predict when rains would occur. The appearance of fire ants or army ants was a definite and sure indication that rain was eminent and would fall within a few days. She could also detect it through her body reactions. She was fairly accurate in her predictions and would be on target many times. I used to follow and sometimes record her predictions on rainfall patterns in our area. Indigenous knowledge is a useful tool in many instances, but little attention is paid to it.

I learnt how to collect and conserve rainwater from her. She used to collect water by any utensils available. She had big earthen pots which could store cold water for weeks without it getting spoilt. We therefore did not have to go to Riagayi River to fetch water that frequently. This must have been my early training in water conservation. I am an ardent fanatic in rainwater harvesting and can use any means possible to collect all water falling from a roof.

When I was in NEMA, I appealed to the Ministry of Water to advance the notion of water harvesting from all house roofs for irrigation or general washing. It has not been possible to preserve Abagusii culture. This includes the naming culture, among others. It has been eroded over time due to less emphasis on the importance of culture conservation by the people. Kenya has an educational policy on the promotion of local languages and dialects. The urban influence has had a negative implication on the same. Resistance from some teachers has not helped either. This is an absurd trend of events and one day, the future generations will have no cultural identity due to its erosion.

The worst thing that has happened during my adult life is witnessing a systematic, diminishing of African traditions, cultures and some languages. According to UNESCO, a number of languages in Kenya have either become extinct (such as *Omoti*, *Ong'amo* and *Sogoo*) or they are in serious danger of becoming extinct (*Bong'om*, *Suba*, *El Molo* and *Terik*). The westerners are preoccupied with rediscovering

themselves and tracing their ancestry, whereas we in the developing world are busy dismantling our own cultures and values. The consequences are grave if we do not put mechanisms in place to preserve and promote what is left of our cultural identity and pride.

Consequently, during my tenure as VC, I encouraged members of staff to embrace African indigenous knowledge and approaches to enrich teaching of the sciences. For example, we designed a whole course in the horticulture department that focused on traditional methods of preserving indigenous vegetables. This culminated into creating a renowned scientist in this area, Prof. Mary Abukosa Onyango, who won several science awards in the area of indigenous crops and vegetables. Some of these vegetables were becoming extinct and the idea we had then was to popularize them and promote their use for their nutritional and health benefits. I also initiated a botanical garden in the university which still thrives and promotes research, learning and conservation of Kenyan herbs which are medicinal but are threatened with extinction.

These efforts were later acknowledged and strengthened by the UNESCO, Director General, H. Matsuura, who created a Chair in the Horticulture Department. I will discuss the benefits of this chair to the university later in this work. I also initiated the teaching of Kiswahili, as an African language though the university was largely offering science-based disciplines. I thought this was my good contribution to harnessing the benefits of African languages in academic discourse.

Kiswahili language is now being promoted all over East Africa, particularly Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The advocacy for promoting all Kenyan languages and dialects has gained momentum. There is a move to ensure that schools in rural areas should teach in their mother tongues in the early classes. The move is commendable.

My mother's actions enlightened us on how to share the little we had with others. She always reminded us that one would never be fully satisfied to share the little one had, but one had to be generous with the little that God had provided one. One statement she used to implore all of us was that "energy is never exhausted no matter how much work you do, it regenerates; you may die without using it if you are lazy". It simply meant that working hard will not kill you. The philosophy compares well with the current multitasking notion, the more one does, the more one accomplishes.

My late brother-in-law, Senior Chief Timothy Omwenga Rogito, was a great teacher. Whenever I visited him he used to sing for me and my nephews, Samuel, Kemunto and Onchuru the song which was widely known by many educators: "*Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise.*" I was in Standard Six when I heard the song and memorized this stanza. I still cite it to my children. It may not make sense to many but I use it as a planning philosophy and guide.

Mother was an early riser and all of us followed suit. She used to remark that if by 12 noon you have not met your day's target, forget it, the whole day is gone. You cannot recall, hold, chase or borrow time. It goes and lapses for good. Since then time keeping to me has never been compromised. This is an attribute that I acquired from my primary school days. I have kept the habit and believe that the few successes I have achieved are mainly due to my strict observance of time and deadlines.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church usually holds its annual camp meetings in August. The meetings normally last for a week. My father's expansive land used to be a meeting venue in the early 1960s. This was because we had a large plantation of black wattle and eucalyptus trees to provide day-long shade for the congregation. This was the time when I knew the importance of trees in microclimate amelioration. The notion of tree planting in the late 1980s and 1990s, therefore, was not a surprise to me as my father had thousands of them planted in our land as early as from the 1960s.

The annual camp meeting exposed me to hundreds of people who came from several areas of Nyanza Province. They included church choirs, elders, pastors, secondary and primary schools students. I was a young boy then, tending cattle all day long. But during this time, I would let the cattle loose, hang around the venue and listen to the Bible citations and excellent choirs. The different choirs from churches were the most attractive during this fete. I could imagine angels descending from heaven and witness visions.

As a young boy then, I was so moved by the events and decided to join the Nyamagesa SDA Church Choir. The choir master was James Obare Nyarunda. I do not remember how I was able to cope with singing, but I recall that too much time was spent on practising singing. Every evening of the working days was spent in the church singing on top of our voices. I was there punctually and sang for one year; but after joining Kisii School, I discontinued.

I then became involved only as a leader in counting the camp attendants on Saturdays. I thought that the time spent in singing was too much for other chores like doing homework and washing my clothes. I reduced the attendance periods to concentrate on my school work, but continued to perform other church functions. It was not easy either since there was too much memorizing of hymns and verses. I slowly pulled out but attended church services as usual. Time management became crucial and I had to choose between singing and recitations or school work and church service. Something had to go.

The many experiences I went through as a young person hardened me a lot. I could give guidance in decision-making at an early age. I took risks in implementing my duties and occasionally stepped on other people's toes inadvertently. The punishments we went through made me realize that hard work pays. Being obedient, time-observing, and keeping on the right side of the law made me excel in my work since I did not have to look back for fear of some error committed.

The stress we go through now is a manifest of upbringing. I suffered uncalled for humiliation early, but bore it like a warrior and moved on. My integrity and inner strength were displayed early and are visible traits to date. I believed in friendship even as a child and the many friends I made during my school days became an asset later in my adult life. Fair play in decision-making overrides many human virtues.

The immeasurable lessons from my parents made me the person I am now. My parents and siblings have contributed to my public image, career and character. As I compiled this book, one of the greatest writers, Chinua Achebe, passed away in the USA in late March 2013. I read one of his books for my KSCE literature examination. The book, *Things Fall Apart* was a classic in its own category. I literally memorized the book and the characters mentioned in it. Little did I know that I would go and work in Nigeria and visit his ancestral land. It was amazing for me to cross the River Niger at Onitsha City to visit Chinua Achebe's birthplace.

A lot has been written about Achebe's works, and suffice it to say that those of us who had the opportunity to read Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) discovered the gaps and inadequacies created by the colonial powers. The very strong characters depicted like Okonkwo show the richness of culture in Nigeria. The strong belief that the white man came to Africa and did little to develop it is evidenced in the book. The eroding of African cultures is sweeping across the continent as this can be seen in the disappearance of local languages and adoption of western culture. My stay in Nigeria will form a separate chapter in this book. The way many Nigerians revere their traditions and culture is of great cultural and symbolic significance.

I scored impressive results in my primary school leaving examinations at Ibacho Primary School. I was selected to join Form One at the then Government African School (GAS) Kisii in January 1966. The names were displayed on the students' noticeboard and a relative delivered the good message to me. My parents, brothers and sisters were excited over the good results and I had to visualize my life at a boys' boarding school.

The fact that I was going away from my parents' comfort to join a group of students drawn from all over Kenya scared me. Luckily for me, there were several senior boys from my village who were already there. I had been told about bullying by Form Two students and wondered what that entailed. James Nyarunda, Ratemo Obare, Nyaora Mirieri and many more were already there and I knew they would protect me. My elder brother, Nyamwange, was very happy that I joined Kisii High School which was government-supported and we paid very little fees. He was relieved of this burden. My father planned for my trip, bought a small wooden box with a tiny padlock, my first pair of black shoes, stockings and off I went. He gave me some money to cover my fare and no pocket allowance.

I took a bus from Keroka bus station to Kisii School. Kisii town was about 20 miles (30 km) from my home and the road was murrum-covered. The inviting letter

clearly indicated that we were fully boarded; meals and beddings were provided by the school. We were given uniforms, toiletries, all writing materials, a bed, mattress and beddings. We actually ate better at school than at home. We had breakfast comprising porridge, ten o'clock tea, assorted lunch, four o'clock tea, dinner and occasionally cocoa, tea or milo at night. In addition to the said menu, some privileged students had facilities for brewing their own coffee and had the means to buy bread to go it with late at night. I will allude to this selected group of students later.

I checked into school and found several other Form One students from other parts of Kenya. I met the best of the best from other schools, particularly South Nyanza, Rift Valley and Western Kenya. I had been told by my two elder brothers (Nyamwange and Onami) who had studied there about the strict rules imposed on students by the British teachers and the stiff competition by students from other schools. I was also briefed about weekend movies in the compound, dancing, entertainment and students' mischief. I was reminded time and again that I was going out to join other students from various communities and must take care of myself and be a responsible man. I was no longer a young boy running around doing some home errands.

The media of communication in Kisii High School was English and Kiswahili. That was going to be the nature of my life over the next four years. I had to live with a Kenyan community and not a Kisii one. I arrived in the compound and went through the registration formalities, after which I was given a bed, mattress, two sheets and two blankets and was booked in Ruri House.

There were several other dormitories in the compound which included Manga, Sameta, Wire, Kionganyo, and Homa where other students were distributed. The newcomers, monos as they called us, were taken round the school facilities for orientation. We visited the library, the school clinic, agriculture farm, chemistry and physics laboratories.

In the meantime, other senior students were in classes for prep which we were informed was mandatory up to 10 pm. The senior boys who took us round the campus told us of the importance of upholding the good name of Kisii High in terms of performance and reputation. I was satisfied with the briefings as we got to interact with students from other tribes. All of us Form One students looked new and were impressed at the facilities here compared to those found in primary schools. We later had supper before we retired to bed around 10 pm. This was an excellent orientation.

High School Experience

Kisii High was the turning point in my life and career development. I developed my life-long traits there. I recall that my school registration number was 1878 and I took my PhD degree in 1978 from Rutgers University, USA. I will always remember these two magic numbers.

As a fresh entrant from the rural area of Nyamagesa, I had to plan my life and career interests from the onset. I had to work hard and interact with the other boys on a daily basis. I made many friends with whom we shared common interest, like attending Sabbath regularly and forming new study groups.

Kenya had gained independence when I joined Kisii High School and a good number of teachers were still from the United Kingdom. The headmaster, Mr Bowles, who addressed us was so brief that I did not follow all that he said. He knew that house masters and senior boys would expound on his speech as we were being oriented during the week. Mr Bowles however, a chain cigarette smoker, was always available for consultations and used to receive parents and visitors in his office regularly.

His deputy, Mr Brown, was a proud young man who taught English with a typical Queen's accent. His interest was to train us to speak and write like them. Many school mates strived to imitate the Queen's English at the expense of Kiswahili. In any case, the subject was compulsory and if one failed it, one's grading was affected; one was automatically awarded a lower grade. There was, hence, justification to read and write English and pass it well. This was my second encounter with brainwashing the African mentality. The primary school disc incident was still fresh in my mind. In the secondary school it was even worse, one had to pass the English language or flunk altogether.

I settled down quickly during my first year in Form One and embarked on my class work. Form Two students bullied us. We had to clean halls, wash utensils, mop floors and do all sorts of work because we were 'monos'. My dormitory, Ruri, had outside bathrooms which were used by about 60 students and were not the cleanest at times.

The dormitory was shared by all students from Form One to Form Six. This was an excellent arrangement because we truly interacted freely with senior boys who were very mature and always ready to protect, advise and even mentor us. They actually assisted in controlling the Form Two students who were mistreating the Form Ones. Students from the Luo community were the majority in Kisii High School, followed by Kisiis and Luhyas. There were other tribes from various regions of Kenya. Again, this was the best combination of students from all over the country.

We lived and interacted as one large family; a fact that the then headmaster, Mr Bowles, enjoyed referring to during parade times. He was fond of encouraging us to see one another as brothers and not Luo, Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luhya or Kisii. We were all one large Kenyan community. He was aware of the tribal and cultural differences amongst us, but played them down.

This approach and encouragement had implications on the stability of the school and discipline. I later appreciated the importance of a multi-cultural, multi-tribal and ethnic cohesion in Kenya. The universities being set up these days are dismantling this grand original cohesion by being tribe-oriented. I made several

friends with whom I tagged during my first year in school, and with whom I later came to serve in various leadership roles in the public service.¹

It is important to demonstrate a typical week of a Kisii High School student in an attempt to understand the behavioural pattern which instilled discipline in us. We had classes from Mondays to Fridays and half-day on Saturdays. Seventh Day Adventist students were exempted from the morning studies on Saturdays.

During the week, we normally got up at 5 am after hearing a wake-up bell and embarked on morning cleaning. I used to have cold showers which were not a bother to me then. Temperatures in the region could sometimes drop to 9° Celsius and showers could be very cold. We had breakfast at 6 am and went to parade on Mondays at 7 am. We were usually addressed by the duty master or headmaster, and classes started promptly at 7.30 am. There were tea and lunch breaks with classes ending at 4 pm. The prefects on duty ensured strict adherence to the times. I had to be alert at all times as I did not want to be late for any function.

The head boy, prefects and monitors were so powerful that they could freely mete out punishments to the boys. We were about one thousand boys, each of whom had his own character. Every dormitory had a house prefect in charge of order and discipline. At the same time, we had other prefects in charge of the library, games, dining halls/kitchen and dispensary. They were all equal in the discharge of their duties. They were usually selected from the senior forms – Three, Four, Five and Six. There were exceptions. For example, the dining hall and kitchen had to have two prefects and two assistants because of the load of work involved.

I was lucky to be appointed as a dining hall assistant during my second year of study. We were nominated by the headmaster in consultation with the house master. I had therefore some more privileges than the rest of my class mates. Later in the third form, I was elevated to prefect status. I started my management responsibilities in earnest at a very early stage. My duties included all issues to do with food, hygiene and water. As a kitchen prefect, I had to attend to all these issues including management of old cooks.

But my primary objective in Kisii High School was to do well in studies and join a university. The responsibilities did not therefore deter my performance; if anything they gave me extra impetus. Since there were four of us responsible for dining hall matters, we agreed to co-operate under the general supervision of the senior prefect, Samuel Langat. We agreed not to disrupt our lessons for any reasons.

I was in charge of food rations to the students, receiving raw and dry foods. They included meat, flour, rice, beans, maize, bananas, beverages, cooking fat, salts, curry powders, and greens. We agreed that the suppliers must come at a specified time on certain days of the week or during weekends to avoid interruption of classes. Occasionally, the supplier could deliver foodstuffs during class hours. I made it clear that I would not leave my class to receive any food supply. Either the supplier had to come at lunch hours or between 4 pm and 5 pm on specific days. We alternated

receipt of merchandise with my colleagues. The school bursar was to oversee that what we received was properly recorded for payment. There was no compromise on quantity or quality. The ledger book was under lock and key and I used to carry the key at all times when on duty.

The bursar was not an honest person. He would tempt us to receive the rations during class hours so as to possibly inflate the quantities. The suppliers also wished to deliver their merchandise at odd hours to influence us and inflate records. We detested this habit and threatened to quit our roles. I was brought up in a strict Christian family and my parents provided for the basics. We were not ready to jeopardise our school tenure.

While at school, we were provided monthly with a bar of soap, toilet papers, and uniforms and as prefects, a lantern and kerosene for night use. In fact there was no need for pocket money. All meals were provided and they had a balanced ration. The little money I was provided with was used to buy peanuts at break time or a loaf of bread for night snack. As a young boy, I would be induced into making a wrong entry into the ledger. That was tantamount to committing a crime and contrary to the norms of the society and Christian beliefs. This has been my driving principle unto this day.

I was respected as a prefect but the role could be overwhelming at times. I was in charge of the cooks and it was my responsibility to give them the daily meal portions from the store for the 1,000 students. I used to weigh out the day's raw food early in the morning for the whole day's preparation. There were special diet cases which were a bother at times. A few students had health issues, so doctors had to recommend specific diets for them. It was my duty to ensure that cooks prepared the menu for these students.

I recall one, Okitete Orwa, who was always complaining of his rice and beans not having been cooked on time. He liked me so much that even after high school, he kept in touch and would call me to discuss and reflect on the past. He became a lecturer at one of the Kenyan universities.

I was very popular among the students because I was always on their side, especially when the bursar wanted to reduce food quantities. I recall a case when they planned a riot because the headmaster had discontinued the 10 o'clock tea. In protest, they boycotted lunch and demanded for reinstatement of the tea as well as an accompaniment of either bread or sweet banana.

The headmaster called all the prefects to the boardroom to sort out the problem. Mr Gabriel Walobwa, the headmaster then, had just been transferred to Kisii High School. I gauged him as a polite man and kind of a pushover. With this in mind, I calmly told him and his deputy that the radical change in the menu was not appropriate in the middle of the term since the budget of supplies had already been done and formalized. My colleagues looked at me with surprise. I asserted that the status quo ought to remain until some other time as

this would disrupt classes. I even told him that as a kitchen prefect, I knew that meal arrangements had been completed for the term. He obliged.

I delivered the message to the students who resumed classes and appreciated my intervention. I had total respect for my teachers but never cowed from telling them the justifiable truth. They all liked me, and duty masters were particularly happy with the level of judgement I made regarding students' demands.

All prefects were my friends simply because I was generous in the provision of additional meals whenever requested. I was strict and did not allow anybody in the kitchen, as I was already aware of food contamination and kitchen hygiene. This was our top priority as kitchen managers. I do not recall an epidemic due to food or water contamination. I was aware of the consequences of poor cooking environments. This early experience later gave me a good starting point as a Vice-Chancellor in the management of a university kitchen and dining hall. The management experience was further translated into my becoming a Director General, National Environment Management Authority (NEMA). I also applied the same leadership qualities in JKUCAT (then a college before being chartered in the year 1994) when I was a Principal of the University College from 1992 to 1994 and later a Vice-Chancellor from 1994 to 2003.

My involvement in student welfare did not deter my academic performance. In fact, I planned my programme so well that I had extra time to read. All prefects were privileged to have a lantern and kerosene provided free by the school for night duties.

The campus generator was normally put off at 11 pm by a one Mr Obondi. Prefects also had special cubicles in each hall which served as 'offices'. In my case, kitchen prefects had a neat office in the kitchen which was only accessible to us. However, other prefects and their friends used their cubicles for unauthorised night reading after Obondi shut down the generator. I am sure teachers knew about this habit but turned a blind eye. Kisii High School and indeed Kisii town was not connected to the national power grid in the 1960s. We were given free kerosene weekly for dormitory lighting in case of a problem with students or in case of some emergency.

Knowing the embarrassment I would encounter if I performed poorly made me read very hard in the morning hours. My close class mate and friend whom I shared a double-decker with, James Ongwae, wondered where I went every morning. But he suspected it was the kitchen. I indeed went to the kitchen at 4 am and read for one hour uninterrupted before the rest of the boys got up. The reality of the matter was that I knew the amount of time I spent doing chores as a kitchen prefect and I had to compensate my lost time. I had to read at odd times in order to catch up. I knew this was not permitted but my future depended on it.

I already had an experience of reading hard in Standard Eight. I therefore gained seven odd hours a week for revision, by putting in an extra hour daily for seven

days. A good number of prefects used their time well and could light their lanterns in the cubicles and study. Our store office was, however, private with no bed nearby to tempt me to sleep. I did my homework and revision without any interruption before the official wake-up time of 5 am.

Students from Ruri House were known to be bright, but rough and mischievous. It had some of the most outstanding academic records for several decades. The late Professor Frederick Angawo Onyango, who later became my Deputy Vice-Chancellor at JKUAT, and consequently the Founding VC of Maseno University, set an academic record in 1958 which was never broken. He was my senior by several years but each time I go to the records, I still find his marks on top. He had the highest respect for academic performers.

Nurturing

The ages of 14 to 18 are no doubt the formative years. My growth and development in high school literally shaped my future life. My mentors and role models were many; starting with my brothers, uncles, cousins and eventually both primary and secondary school teachers. They all contributed to my academic and wholesome development. My parents and uncles had tremendous impact on my management of both time and social relationships.

Ibacho Primary School was managed by the likes of Mr Machoka Singombe who would assign us 30 mental arithmetic sums to be done in half an hour. If one did not finish and score over 20 of them right, one got canes equivalent to the wrong answers. I learnt to be fast and accurate, but I got whipped too. Later on in upper primary, one re-known disciplinarian, Mr. Stephen Michoma, took us through the final examinations. He was a no-nonsense head teacher and we all saw him as an extraordinary human being. His statements were brief, specific and instructive. Failure to comply meant instant punishment. I owe a lot to these two teachers.

Not many pupils could tolerate both teachers, Singombe and Michoma. I, however, adored them. They had influenced on what I am today and their teaching methods were equally instrumental. So when one talks about mentors and role models, one should look at the wide picture of those persons who touched their souls. Every good performance on my part made me learn something. I would sit down and pray that I could be like so and so. I obviously wanted to teach but not beat my students!

That was the beginning of my philosophy of non-penalty traits. For example, Mr. Charles Magati cheerfully taught us English and handwriting. I sincerely admired his teaching method and sense of humour and even emulated him later in my career. Mr Gilbert Nyangweso taught us handwriting using a blackboard and chalk. We used nibs and ink and produced good handwriting. We were also taught vernacular as a subject.

In Kisii High School, several Kenyan, British, Asian and Americans teachers taught us. My experience with the teachers there was enriching. A British teacher who, for example, taught English Language and Literature used to be so emphatic in the use of correct grammar that we had no choice but to comply. Many of us therefore scored highly in the language. We were thoroughly brainwashed and used to be told that if one failed in English, one automatically got a mere certificate despite excellent performance in other subjects. (You recall the primary school discs?!) We believed in the English language both oral and written. We had been so brainwashed that we forgot to promote our mother tongues.

Of course all other subjects were equally important but English was compulsory in all British colonies. In such circumstances, we had no choice but to emulate these teachers who also made a difference in my life. The teacher of English was sure of our passing and regarded us better in English than typical British youths. We obviously took these remarks positively and excelled. Any compliments from any of our teachers made us work harder. We further became more entrenched in the use of the language.

Kenyan teachers were very good in Mathematics, Geography, Biology, Chemistry and Physics. I took a religious study subject which was taught by Mrs Green and most of us who took the subject scored a grade one. We studied the New Testament and I still recall the style by which she taught the course – it was practical, real and complemented my church lessons.

What was very significant here was the relationship between our behaviour and Jesus. Humility, love and service to the community were emphasized. We argued and debated on how we should behave in society as adults. All those trips that Jesus made in Israel and his encounter with myriad problems made me a daring young man. My visit to Israel with my wife Esther in 2010 reminded me of the lessons that Mrs Green had taught me in 1966–1969.

Humility was the overriding virtue that I learnt. I still read the New Testament with critical reference to the practical nature of Jesus' trip to Israel. Incidentally, I am writing this section of the book during the Easter Holiday (2013) having read many newspaper stories about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I recall the fourteen steps at the Golgotha where he walked through as he was being heckled by the natives. The question I ask myself now is whether we emulate what Jesus did for mankind. What can we learn and construe individually or collectively from His humility?

One of the teachers who taught us Chemistry George Eshiwani, later became a Kenyatta University Vice-Chancellor, whom I worked with as his Deputy Principal in charge of Academic Affairs at JKUAT. He came to Kisii High School for teaching practice and left after about six months. He used to play hockey and coach students after classes. As his Deputy Principal, I had a lot of respect for him and enjoyed learning from him on how to handle staff and student problems. He had a lot of respect for me because I delivered on time any assignments he gave me.

It is him who first told me the famous phrase that managers use: Management by walking around (MBWA). I later perfected on it and, indeed, managed by walking around in my later administrative assignments. I took agriculture as one of my courses in Kisii High School. We were about twenty who opted for it as an examinable subject. The course was taught by the American Peace Corps in selected schools of Kenya. I was very good at the course as we covered practical areas. In addition to theory, we literally went to the farm and handled livestock, chicken, crops, fertilizers, machinery, pesticides, and indeed saw the effect of various experimental treatments. We were also privileged to get driving licenses for tractor and later motor vehicles. My love for agriculture and crop protection started from here.

I wish to narrate two incidences that happened during our learning interactions. An American Peace Corp member called Mr Bean came to class and found us making noise since we were not occupied. This was in 1969. He came to the front of the Machinery Building and shouted at us, “You stupid boys, stop making noise or I shoot you like Rev. Martin Luther King.”

The remark shocked us because we were old enough to understand its racial undertones. We took him head on and marched off to the headmaster’s office to report him. This man, Bean, was a young BSc holder from Virginia Polytechnic University who took us for granted. We caused havoc and other senior students in Form Five and Six joined us and demanded an apology or we could march to the Kisii District Commissioner’s office. The headmaster summoned the teacher and his senior colleague, Mr Price, to explain the matter.

Martin Luther King had been shot dead in the USA and we were aware of racial uprising in that vast country. We read the papers in the library, followed the news and any slightest provocation related to racial undertones was taken head on. Kenya had also gained independence and we were therefore enlightened on the rights of black people here and in the USA. The headmaster persuaded us to calm down as the head of the Peace Corps apologized on behalf of Mr Bean.

Several other Americans present apologized profusely and explained to us the consequences of such utterances. Mrs Meredith, who was one of our History teachers was very concerned about the remark and during her lesson, she could cover the injustices suffered by black people in the USA. Later on in a related incident, I had to quell students who wanted to beat up a Japanese technician for manhandling a Mechanical Engineering student in the laboratory at JKUAT.

The young Japanese demonstrator asked the student to move away from where he was doing an experiment. The student hesitated a bit; and angered by the student’s slow response, the Japanese fellow took a pail of used oil and poured it on the student’s legs and shoes. The student’s shoes, legs, trousers and socks were soaked with dark engine oil!

He came to my office dripping oil. I was angry and demanded to see the offender with his team leader. In my mind I was fully convinced that this silly act was racial

in nature and the young man despised Africans. I could not condone that act. I felt sorry for the poor student and calmed him down. I will reflect on these academic injustices when I discuss the issues revolving on my experiences with donors and support to our universities during a time of crisis.

I recalled what the headmaster did and applied similar but a harsher decision on the offender than my headmaster at Kisii High School. I could not accept an apology but have the fellow go back to Japan. I told his team leader in no uncertain terms that the young man had no place in my institution. He had to go. My action did not affect the JICA support programmes; it was a lesson to other nationals who were involved in our projects. The matter ended as soon as he left the country.

All the other experts might have learnt from my action. I compensated the student and gave him money to buy the damaged shoes, socks and pants. I also counselled him and told him the many racial problems that exist around the world, citing South African Apartheid and the USA racial tensions, and even some countries in South America. My act hardened me as I faced more challenging decisions later in life.

School Detentions

Kisii High School had laws and regulations which governed students. The prefects executed them. The headmaster and his staff monitored their effectiveness. Weekends were rather free of the weekdays' rigour. Every Saturday, the headmaster, Mr Bowles, would inspect houses for cleanliness and award a trophy and a certificate at the end of the term to the best house. He would inspect students during assembly, check on uniforms, house floors, the veranda and cleanliness of beddings. I actually thought that was an excellent way to keep us smart. Government African School Kisii, as it was called then, was a renowned national school for good conduct. Teachers wanted to keep the good name. After several inspections and award of marks, the cleanest house and well-behaved boys got an impressive trophy. Ruri House received several such recognitions for most of the period I was there. Sameta used to be a runner-up despite its rowdy boys. Ruri, however, had more cunning and mischievous boys than any other dormitories

The role of prefects was to execute and monitor compliance with the rules. After the Saturday morning parade, boys would have lunch and leave at 2 pm for town, a distance of one mile down the road. The whole town would be dotted with Kisii High School boys, all in the white shirts and grey shorts uniform. It was a punishable crime to wear any other attire than a white shirt, a red striped tie and grey shorts or trousers at all times.

One could not go to town before 2 pm unless one had an exit sheet from the headmaster. Prefects were always on the alert to get offenders, and that is why they became unpopular. There were more than twelve prefects in any one given term, mainly those in Form Four and Form Six. They had special privileges both in the

dining halls and halls of residence. They also had red-bonded blazers with a badge inscribed 'PREFECT' for easy identification.

They were not paid any money for their services but were highly respected by the teaching staff and students. These were the advisors (the kitchen cabinet) of the headmaster as they represented various classes and departments. Occasionally, however, some of the prefects would be unreasonable in detaining students or punishing them for mistakes which were trivial. When a boy was detained, he could not go out on Saturdays and would be assigned some manual work to do. There were all types of laborious work he could be assigned to do. I witnessed a few cases where a prefect was beaten up by a student because of unfair punishment. Such cases would be handled by the duty master or headmaster.

Expulsion of students was rare and summoning of parents to Kisii High School was not a common demand. Punishment, however, was always meted out to naughty boys. Students' behaviour in general was commendable. We never heard of or witnessed the current vices like drugs or alcohol consumption which are rampant in many secondary schools. We were actually well-disciplined young boys although there might have been isolated cases.

Entertainment

An all-boys' school had to find ways and means of keeping teachers and their students happy. Saturday afternoons were left free, either to go to town or remain in the compound to engage in extra-curricular activities. This included debating with other schools, games, public lectures, athletics, club meetings, church gatherings, choirs, and agricultural clubs and indoor games.

I recall one afternoon when my late uncle, Justice Nyarangi, who was himself an old boy of Kisii High School, came to see me at school. He was a resident magistrate at Kisii Law Courts and was to deliver a speech on the role of courts in Kenya. He called me after the talk, put me in his grey Volkswagen car and drove me around town. I liked the gesture and hoped to own a car like him. He used to talk a lot and told me to work hard and buy a car like the one he had. We had tea in town before he dropped me back to Ruri House where he had resided as a student several years before.

Occasionally, specific girls' schools could be invited for any of the social events like speech days. I recall Ng'iya and Kereri Girls schools visiting us on Saturday afternoons. The interaction period was so short (from 2 pm to 4 pm) that it was practically not feasible to develop any relationship. In any case, their matrons were so watchful that every movement out of the meeting venue was monitored. Their teachers used to shield off the girls from close proximity dancing. One could not be seen approaching the girls.

The most longed for occasion was Saturday night. Students looked forward to a good meal of rice and beef or beans, a hot cup of chocolate; less number of boys eats

that night because some had been in town and had met their relatives who had fed them well. We allowed for a generous serving portion for the unlucky boys who may not have had relatives in town. Most important of all was the fact that as a kitchen and dining hall prefect, I allowed for extra serving as long as the food lasted. We apportioned the same food for cooking at all meals. I was popular for this generosity.

Saturday night was also a night of music and movies! Every boy, except certain sects of Christians, attended these events. We had an entertainment prefect, the DJ and selected records. The DJ would spin the then latest hits of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the records were from British musicians like the Beatles. The bull dance, as it was known then, was so popular that teachers would join the dancing once in a while.

The best dancers then were the Luo, who exhibited the latest dancing swings learnt from Congolese popular musicians. I do not recall having many live bands in Kisii High School. The entertainment usually lasted from 8 pm to 11 pm and all systems stopped. There was a very low-key school band which was led by the head boy, Charles Odera, and assisted by Francis Ongegu Okengo, called 'The Thrashes'. It was in fact not that good and was never liked by the boys. It, however, filled in the free weekend time.

Movies were shown on alternate Saturdays or when they arrived from the UK. Mrs Green was in charge. She used to introduce the films and characters in such eloquent detail that by the time we started viewing them, we already knew every character and role in the movie. Many of these films were drawn from the literature we studied or the thrilling James Bond series. The James Bond – 007 – movies were so popular that many young boys, like John Abbot Nyanchoka, nick-named themselves James Bond and behaved like him in ordinary life. Movies like *Live and Let Die* were featured, and attracted unprecedented interest from the boys.

In addition to weekly movies, plays of Shakespeare were featured on Wednesday nights. All the literature books we used were adapted and acted by selected students. The plays, dances, films, extra-curricular activities made our days as boarders extremely interesting. Sports like rugby, athletics, basketball and volleyball were a thrill whenever we encountered schools like Bishop Cardinal Otunga Secondary School.

I recall that the world record 4 x 400 metre luminary, Robert Ouko, was a class ahead of me. In Rugby, the Kisii High School Sevens were celebrated all over East Africa. I was not good in any of the games, but a good cheering boy. All these activities made us behave well and they reduced the monotony. We studied hard and matured sensibly. We were a community. We were a well-disciplined lot for all the time I was in Kisii High School. There was no corporal punishment as witnessed in the primary schools. Maturity was setting in as we aged. The future plans were drawing near.

High School and Political Turmoil in the Country

One clear Saturday afternoon on 5 July 1969 we received some unbelievable news. It was a school games day and we had visitors who attended the meeting. I was in the dormitory after cheering our house participants. A fellow student walked to my bed where I was having a siesta and asked me if I had heard that Joseph Tom Mboya had been assassinated.

I got up, surprised and requested him to repeat the statement. He asked again if I knew that T.J. Mboya had been killed. I walked out of the hall to make further enquiry. Mr Mboya had been to Kisii High School the previous weekend and delivered a moving public lecture on Pan Africanism. He had spoken to us so eloquently that we were touched by our naivety regarding racial segregation. Also, Africa was one continent balkanized into tribal segments creating unnecessary antagonism. He further thundered that Kenya was one country but had been segmented into tribal cocoons which created undue animosity. This was an eye-opener to us young secondary school boys. To be told that he was now gone was one tall order to comprehend.

Soon after the confirmation from the radio news, games stopped and I could see students gathering in groups, talking in low tones. The rest was history.

Mboya's death was a blow to the nation as he was viewed as the potential future president of Kenya. There were major political repercussions soon after the announcements. I learnt one thing: that everyone plans to win fame through the most uncouth manner. Some people will use every crude means necessary to advance themselves. All that one looks for are people's manoeuvres, their actions in the past and what one might expect in the future; you then realize that everyone is after power and to get it or keep it, one must destroy others. That is human nature and there seems to be no shame.

The students mourned the departure of a great statesman. I did not understand the whole reason for this inhuman act. It was only a few days before that we had been threatened by an agriculture teacher that he could shoot us like Martin Luther King. It started to dawn on me that killing of persons was not confined to one place but was worldwide. I recalled that there were many such shoot-outs only that we did not comprehend their motives and the consequences.

My final days in Kisii High School were eventful. We used to have house parties with our house masters. These get-togethers were great bonding activities which I later employed in my future administrative careers. Corporate bonding in many parts of the world is the current in-thing which has been perfected. During our house interactions, music, dancing, and food were plentiful. Final year students had special treats and were respected as they were now leaving the secondary school life for higher education or job placement.

The British teachers were leaving the country one by one as Kenyans took over from them. None of them was happy to leave the country. They looked sad

due to the fact that their departure time was imminent. In fact, we students felt sympathetic towards the very good ones. They openly expressed their sadness at leaving Kisii High School, let alone Gusiiland, a place of natural beauty.

We bid them farewell one by one. The lucky ones were absorbed in the Directorate of Education, in the Ministry of Education, Nairobi. Others were posted to junior secondary schools while a good number opted to stay in Kenya and take up local citizenship. To date, I have witnessed various foreign nationals under the same predicament. Construction engineers, volunteers, NGO staff, technical experts and many more have fallen into this trap, never to return to their native countries and have opted to stay to perhaps get married here and become naturalized. Indeed, this country has its own unique beauty which many of us do not appreciate.

Reflections

My understanding of culture, people, behaviour, and future careers started to surface when I was a young boy. I learnt at an early stage that obedience pays; timely accomplishment of assignments provides other opportunities for one to do more. I also learnt that arguments wasted time if you knew the result of the debate. Creating harmony with others reduced anxiety and enabled us to accomplish more. I never wanted confrontations or a situation where I would be subjected to ridicule. I needed to be on the lead at all times where possible, whether in class, debates, errands and risks. I never shied away from difficult tasks. As a young person, I wanted to tell the truth and be told the same.

I considered all pupils the same and equal in my class no matter their age and status. That was why I could report a teacher's wife for punishment. This was innocent self-punishment, and suicidal at the worst. I thought I was doing great by being impartial in my monitoring duties. I assumed that everybody older than me was always right and deserved the highest respect. Hierarchy to me was an automatic command and had to be respected. I later learnt that it could be abused.

Leadership was accorded by others and I never asked for it, but was appointed to it. Humility overrides all other virtues, but being humble is not a reflection of weakness but respect. I had plenty of mentors and role models. My brothers, uncles and teachers all portrayed respectable images to emulate. I feared being the odd one out. They all appreciated good boys and girls and were ready to compliment us.

During my early years, I learnt that there is nothing more encouraging than praises and compliments. Just words like, "You are a nice boy", "keep up the good work", or "top of tops", a comment I once received from my English essay lady teacher, made me work even harder than the previous time. I recall the good and not-so-good remarks which made me improve my work. There were very constructive comments about my endeavours. Remarks that I rushed at issues and made hasty judgements still haunt me.

I indeed accepted the challenge but have continuously made every effort, over the years, to overcome it. I always tried to overcome the rushed decisions I made in order to reduce the impatience I had about the apparent slower thinkers. This is a handicap which I will always work on to be in line with others. I, however, find that quick action and risk-taking may be beneficial in certain situations.

Primary school days had their glorious moments. The mere fact that I could still recall virtually all my Standard Eight classmates gave me the power to identify and recall my future university students by name.

The harsh realities of class competition for position one in examinations surfaced later on in the survival of the fittest – Darwin's theory of natural competition. The actual long walking distance from Nyamagesa Village to Ibacho Primary School for a period of eight years became a norm to me and I never made any fuss about it. Today I can persevere to the ultimate in school work, field research, laboratory experiments and any other task which may need long hours of endurance to complete.

At an early stage we used to play and at the same time fight. I recall several times, especially end of term, when older boys would literally beat us before we parted ways. In fact we had some kind of gang of youths who protected one another during the end of term. In my case, I identified myself with some older boys who would protect me in case a fight broke out. But elders from the hills were always on alert and we reported the cantankerous boys for disciplinary action. Those small fights, however, hardened us for future survival. We developed survival tactics. Although I was a young leader, it gave me the courage to lead and make reasonable judgement. I had respect for school rules. I knew the hierarchy and my responsibilities were specific. My roles could not clash with those of the prefects.

My teenage life in Kisii High School was more of an exploratory maturing man compounded with heavy academic responsibilities. I realized very early that I had to work even harder to match up with my 100-odd classmates. I found sharper and more focused students from all over the country. I learnt to be humble, timely and obedient. My first year was challenging as I had to adjust to noisy dormitory life, scheduled food programmes, strict rules and regulations on aspects of boarding life. I, however, thoroughly enjoyed interacting and socializing with other communities. I had no choice but to be part of the Kisii School community. Old boys usually came to visit and give talks. The British teachers were regarded just like any other local staff and we had no inferiority complex.

We got used to their practice of strict deadlines. It was an advantage for me as I had always kept time. Stiff academic competition continued unabated. My belief was that I had to score high, a first grade and proceed to the next level or get a well-paying job. Kisii High School therefore succeeded in nurturing me socially and academically. I aimed as high as the other old boys. Great speakers like the late Tom Mboya inspired us. Great politicians whose names were being mentioned

time and again became our absentee mentors even though we had never seen them. My tender age was slowly waning.

The debating society which I joined during my first year in school trained me to reason, think critically and have my facts at the finger tips. It also taught me to be tolerant to divergent views. I was further trained to be a good listener and give a chance to others to also be heard. This was the first place where I tolerated points of order from members, a speaker's power and all types of parliamentary procedures.

I must admit here that most of the members (99%) in the debating society were from the Luo community. I later learnt that the late Mzee Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya had tremendous influence on the youths and on even older generations. I, however, enjoyed the debates, the voting, parliamentary procedure of crossing over and being in a majority or minority government. These debates would later assist me as a university administrator in terms of listening to everyone in case of disputes. I always tell graduate students to be tolerant to their colleagues whenever they present their research project.

My extra-curricular activities involved music, singing, SDA Group membership, plant identification and membership of the Young Farmers' Club. I participated in any other school activity that I could find.

I learnt one bitter lesson when the choir master discriminated against me. Fourteen students had prepared for the national music festival. This was through many hours of singing practice. I mean several hours. The choir pieces were one Luo song which I still sing now and an English one. Having spent virtually every evening singing in the halls, the choir master was told to select only twelve of us to travel to Kisumu, the provincial headquarters and hopefully to Nairobi for the ultimate musical festival.

To my utter dismay, the choir master, Mr Tom Oyieke, eliminated me and another boy! I actually saw blatant tribal discrimination because all the other singers were from one community. This was the very first glaring tribal bias against me. I dismissed the act, and later embarked on my school work. I never took up singing again. But, maybe, I can still do music.

However, I learnt one lesson from this: Indeed, tribal discrimination is a bad and destructive act. I made a major lifetime conviction that for every failure or disappointment, I would turn it around to boost me for better things. Negativity to me was a catalyst for greater heights. This has become my driving force despite any disappointments. A young person never forgets promises. They are debts which must be made good. Past memories of a young person never fade because they are a part of growth and development.

The developmental traits that I have listed are not exhaustible. There are many others like perseverance, confidence, and dedication which are essential. I did not change my habits and social life when I got to Kisii High School; rather I had to adjust to the new scenario. There were several boys in the school who had

different philosophies of life. I slowly started realizing one important advice that our father kept on hammering into our heads as children.

He used to stress that the choices of friends we made at the time would determine our future lives. He further said that moral talents were God's gifts and intellectual talents were due to hard work. I started to realize the importance of choices in character, action, attitude and future career. I also realized that making any choice on any matter was a privilege and not a right. That choice could wreck or build me.

Our housemasters used to have special coffee meetings in the dormitories. Mr Green and his wife were our house heads. I took a religious study course taught by Mrs Green and was sure I could score a grade one in it. Indeed, I did attain a grade one in my final score. I liked the course because it exposed us to critical thinking as did the New Testament. I still debate the rationale of so many desert travels by the prophets and kings and question how they survived in those horrid deserts like the Negev!

The Greens would give us life skill tips to succeed in future. These have formed part of my life skills to date. Their talks enlightened me and made me aspire for more education after my fourth form. I kept on asking myself questions related to my future academic progression. Other than the usual character shaping, we were told time and again, I had my five personal traits that I adored. I called them five essentials to make me succeed in virtually any situation. I enumerate them as follows:

First, I developed a positive attitude, which meant that everything I did was in good faith and would succeed in it. I knew that attitude was not necessarily taught in school, but depended on one's inner feelings. Positive attitude would always create a positive result and the converse was true. I therefore believed at this early stage that I would consider all things that I undertake positively and leisurely. In case I failed, I took that failure as a lesson.

Second, I was a good speaker. I encouraged myself to be an efficient public speaker in any gathering; where possible to be able to speak clearly, forcefully, persuasively, and calmly in front of an audience. The size of the audience did not bother me. I would behave the same. This to me was one important skill I wanted to acquire which we were never taught. This trait would make me more comfortable, confident and saleable. Maybe, I would be able to sell any idea to anybody, be they products or ideologies. The skill would give me more opportunities for career advancement. I ended up delivering conference papers and speeches.

Third is focus. Any success is dependent on effective action which in turn relies on the ability to focus one's attention where it is needed most. I believed in effective productivity habits with a strong sense of focus and discipline. There is no way one can stay on track without strict aim and vision. I knew one fact, either you manage yourself or get mismanaged.

Fourth, self-discipline. This was a life trait which I considered most important. The ability for one to abstain from short-term leisure is so

difficult that we all become victims. School discipline and academic success were equal partners in that endeavour. I always paid special attention to instructions, especially those which had “dos and don’ts”. I knew these could be short or long-term instructions and I decided to be a positive respondent on many of such directives. Self-discipline was very, very demanding. I convinced myself from primary school that discipline accompanied with humility and occasional smiles would get one out of trouble. I had always tried to be a disciplined individual wherever and whenever possible.

Fifth is time consciousness. This is a very critical factor which is unique. Many people take time for granted and forget that it goes by too quickly. I knew from the early ages that every second counts. This is a concern that I shall endeavour to explain in later chapters. Suffice it to say here that I never wanted to waste any time without either reading or doing something useful for myself. I knew that once a day went by, it could never be rewound. That date would be gone and gone forever. I put every minute into good use unless I was incapacitated. I considered day and night hours equally important in my work. Multi-tasking was my hobby.

I also had other additional beliefs. As a young boy, brought up in a Christian home, I always revered the Ten Commandments which we were taught in church and had to abide by them at all times. I made sure that I announced my Christian beliefs whenever I made a first encounter. I still do that today. I may not be the best of preachers, but my actions may tell it all. How did these values impact on me?

When I was about to complete Form Four, I kept on asking where I came from and what the future held for me. I convinced myself that the further I looked backwards, the further I was likely to look forward and succeed. This was a notion which was shared by many successful individuals in major successful corporations and business entrepreneurs. My parents were peasant farmers. Was joining them in that trade a worthwhile venture? The past shapes the future. I had to soldier on.

Goodbye to Kisii High School

The four joyous years that I spent in Kisii High School had to come to an end. There were obviously ups and downs during my days. I made friends, networked a lot and started to mature while studying. I bonded with the most hardworking boys and many cantankerous ones. I learnt how to keep clean shoes, neat stockings, a well-made bed, a clean mopped floor, shiny window panes and, most importantly, preparedness for house inspections and parades. These chores became part and parcel of my daily routine. As a prefect, however, I would be in charge of executing the said chores. Students loved my generosity in food rations and my liberality in meting out punishments. As a prefect, I did not make many enemies like some of my colleagues.

Time had come to have farewell parties and move on. We did our best in the final national examinations and had to wait for the results at home. The house masters organized elaborate parties for the leavers and made parting speeches. Unfortunately, we did not receive any presents when we left the compound because parents were not allowed to attend our parties. In any case, my parents would not have come. Parties were held the previous night before departure. We all packed our personal effects in the little wooden boxes, mainly the exercise books which we had accumulated over the four years.

I believed in one philosophy of life: Success breeds success. If I performed well in my Form Four level examinations, I would then be able to proceed ahead academically. In fact this was a major determinant of one's future career. I searched for a twenty shilling note bill which I had carefully tucked in my Bible for any emergency, found it and headed to the bus station on foot with my wooden box carried aloft.

The whole Kisii town bus station was filled with Kisii High School students proceeding home after closure. We were still in school uniforms. At this point in time, I started recalling the Darwinian Theory, the survival of the fittest, which we had learnt in the Biology class. There were very few buses to rural areas and those who pushed and shouted hardest got a chance to travel. It took me a while to get transport because of the scarcity of buses; those which were available were filled to capacity.

My ability to jostle for space was wanting. We had now joined the larger, unruly, disorganized community. I still behaved like a gentleman but realized that this would not get me far. I had to change tactics and jostle for space like the rest. I finally secured a seat to Nyamagesa Village via Keroka market.

This was at the end of November 1969 when the rainy season was at its peak. The road that bisected Nyamagesa is one mile away from my home and I had to climb up a steep wet hill to get there. It rained on me and I got wet, tired and exhausted, but happily got home at about 6 pm.

I had left my home a novice and returned there a mature boy. My parents were happy to see me and offered me some local porridge made of finger millet to welcome me home. This was another milestone in my life. However, I was pondering what would happen next after the results.

Note

1. They included James Nyarunda, James Ongwae, the Governor of Kisii County, Benson Kangwana, George Omolo, Bornaventure Wendo, Elly Otieno. Osmerah, Charles Odera, Sospeter Arasa Nyagwansa, Samuel Kiplagat, John Wangai among others. I occasionally run into these gentlemen and share the events of old days. Mr Ongwae was duly elected as Governor, Kisii County during the 4 March 2013 General Elections in Kenya.