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First Job Placement

After a brief stay with my parents in Nyamagesa, it became clear that I had to move on and seek employment. Availability of jobs in the 1960s and 1970s was not a problem. One had to perform well in the examinations and have a good attitude to secure a job. My parents and senior brothers advised me to go to Nairobi and join my older brother, Hezron Tirimba (deceased), who was already working there.

He was a very shrewd, risk-taking business entrepreneur. I say this because at his very early working life, he had already bought a house in Buruburu and was capable of accommodating several of us when we visited him in Nairobi. I, therefore, had a domicile. He was not married when I joined him for a job search. He was very happy that I joined him and would possibly get a job and share the payment of his loan for the house. With my arrival, he was also assured of security and company, not mentioning ready prepared meals when he got home.

I joined him just before Christmas of 1969, and spent the holidays with him and several relatives who were staying in other estates of Nairobi. They were all working in various organizations, but would meet during the weekends and share the latest news from home or just spend time together as family members.

I started applying for jobs in private organizations. The first application I made was to Barclays Bank, Queensway. My brother was working with the Ministry of Education and he advised me that banks were paying much better than the government. I took his advice and it was indeed true.

As I was waiting for the feedback from the bank, our results came out around January 1970 and I had scored a second class division in the Form Four examinations. I actually lacked one mark to get a first division. The results were encouraging since I qualified to apply for any jobs in the country or join Form Five which I did not. I was happy, I had attained the grade.

As I applied for the post at the bank, I had also put other applications for universities abroad. Barclays Bank called me for an interview in its Queensway Branch. We were thirty in number. We did both written and oral interviews in

Mathematics and English. A few of us passed and qualified for the posts. It took one week to get feedback. I later learnt that only five of us qualified out of the group of thirty. I did not know anybody in the group. There were two girls and three boys who joined the Queensway branch of the bank.

I was posted to the Intelligence Department which I later discovered was handling loan cases and creditworthy customers. We were four in the department, a pleasant and friendly head of section called Gurmit Singh, one Joel Wainaina and a lady secretary of Asian extraction. I was a fresh trainee from high school. Our duty was to recommend or refuse loan applicants after carrying out a thorough and credible investigation on individual customers' credit-worthiness. I enjoyed doing the turn-over and learnt basic lending criteria in banks. My brother 'H.T' as we called him was very happy that I had secured a well-paying job in the bank. Indeed, the salary was much higher than what he was getting in government. This was good news to friends and relatives. Banks were considered good employers with generous benefits to their employees.

A large proportion of the staff in Barclays Bank were British nationals. The headquarters where I joined was almost 95 percent British staff then. There were a few Asians and Kenyan nationals. Despite having gained independence, absorption of locals had not been fully implemented. Private companies owned by foreigners were still dominated by the British.

My immediate boss, Gurmit Singh liked my work. He relied on me and Joel Wainaina to source information from other banks and produce reports for onward action by one Mr Bird. Mr Bird was the bank's ultimate decision-maker in our department. We rarely interacted with him. I recall one morning when he directly called me on my extension line and demanded that I see him downstairs. He sounded angry and was clearly pursuing something. I first wondered why he called me directly rather than call my boss Mr Singh who was present.

I walked downstairs gently, knocked at his office door and went in. He requested me to sit down and pulled out a pack of turn-over papers which I had worked on for a customer. I thought he was going to commend me for a job well done. He told me point-blank that the negative recommendation I had given to a client was not proper as he personally knew that applicant. I replied that the client's financial standing could not qualify him for a very large loan that he requested. I further told him that I applied the rules as prescribed by the bank. Mr Bird, a short, stocky man thundered to me that I go upstairs and recast the figures to read positive and award the loan. He handed over the papers to me. I looked at them momentarily and walked out of his office. I reflected back at my primary school days when I got a beating for reporting the late-coming of a teacher's wife. Was history repeating itself?

I had, indeed, done the necessary work, given my verdict. Little did I know that other powers would overrule documented results! I went upstairs, relooked

at the documents, briefed Gurmit Singh and wanted him to handle the case. I recast the figures but they still turned out negative. I then told Singh to handle the case in its entirety. I learnt later on that the applicant got the loan, had problems repaying it and court proceedings were instituted to make good for the loan he had borrowed. My technical advice had been, however, ignored.

At one time I thought of reporting the incident to Mr Peter Nyakiamo, who was the first African to be appointed a bank branch manager in Kenya. He was therefore my mentor, and I looked upon him as my advisor. Bank managers at that time commanded a lot of respect and the whites respected him because he was a workaholic. Would he have protected me from Mr Bird? I knew he could not! He probably had enough headaches with the expatriate-dominated bank. In any case, the then young Africans working there considered him a loner and kept aloof from his community primarily because he did not assist in the negotiations of their salaries and other benefits.

During that time, as alluded earlier, most of the bank workers were either British or Asian. Peter Nyakiamo was among the very few Kenyans who had risen to a managerial level of a foreign-owned bank in Kenya. My instincts then were that for an African to rise to that level in a racial working environment, he must have been exceptional and hardworking. I therefore wanted to emulate him as my mentor. He later became a Minister in Former President Moi's government.

My late brother, Samuel Mose, had worked with him in the Kisii branch of Barclays Bank and used to tell us about Peter Nyakiamo, the good gentleman from the Suba community. He trained my brother and they became great friends. It was a coincidence that I had a chance to work with him in the Queensway Branch, the Head Office, Nairobi, several years later. He liked me and wanted me to take up banking as my career.

I started seeing injustices and recalled my primary school case of a teacher's wife coming late to class and not being punished. I also recalled my high school experiences of being trustworthy and fair to all. But I further recalled George Orwell's book, *Animal Farm*, which states that "all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others". This was the typical colonial mentality then. I was never surprised later on to learn that the gentleman was told to leave the country after the expiry of his tenure in the bank.

My stay in the bank was not long. I had been trained in several departments and had become competent to work in any of them. My departure was a loss to the bank. New employees had to be taken to Limuru Barclays Bank Training Centre for bonding, training and induction. I remember a group of twenty trainees from the Nairobi branches assembling there for the week's residential training. We were being inducted to life examples and real exercises encountered in all banks. The trainers were older, experienced bankers, managers and senior accountants who had worked for longer periods than us.

Limuru, which is about thirty kilometres north-west of Nairobi, is one of the coldest places in Kenya. Temperatures would drop to 2°C in the cold months of July to September. I recall the very cold nights we experienced despite small fires lit in our rooms for warmth. Torrential rains would make the place even more chilly than normal. I thoroughly enjoyed the training, networked with other branch staff and shared our varied high school experiences. We were being prepared to take over strategic positions like managers, senior accountants and section heads as the banks were systematically replacing British nationals who were quitting their posts and had opted to reject Kenyan citizenship for the British one.

My close friends later became managers and senior bankers not only in Barclays, but other banks as well. I had the opportunity to network with all the local banks because of the nature of my work. We, the local workers, had issues with top management – despite good competitive salaries. We had a bankers' union which negotiated for better and equitable terms with the British and other nationals.

My typical working days and hours were precise. My brother and I could get up in the morning, have breakfast and by 7 am board a Kenya Bus to downtown Nairobi, a distance of about ten kilometres. There was no big transport hassle then. As people increased in the city, transport became a nightmare, which is evident to this day.

In the 1970s, however, the prices of commodities were lower than the subsequent years. We used to have a well-balanced lunch in town and nice dinner at home. Suffice it to say that the cost of living, transport, and other commodities kept on increasing every year. The current city of Nairobi is nowhere comparable to the Nairobi of 1960s and 1970s.

I did not stay in the bank long enough to utilize my training expertise that I had gained from Limuru Barclays Bank Conference Centre. I got a scholarship which was secured by my elder brother, Joel Onami, who was studying in the USA, to go for further education. I had applied to a few universities in the USA and UK but got admitted to Rutgers University in Brunswick, New Jersey.

It was now a family decision for me to either continue working with the bank or leave for further studies. My brother H.T. was of the opinion that I should stick around and develop a banking career. My other family members thought it wise for me to quit and seek further education. The two groups were both right. It was my turn and privilege to decide.

I said earlier that it was a privilege to make decisions and choices. It was my turn to think. Any decisions I would make had a life-time implication on my future career progression. I returned to Nyamagesa Village to talk to my parents, younger brother Amenya and sister Grace. We agreed that I would quit the bank and proceed for higher education. Adequate consultations were made on this matter with the final decision being mine.

One thing I learnt in the bank was that the employer sucks workers' blood. It was work and hard work at all time. Cashiers and tellers had to be alert at all times, serve customers diligently and be accurate to avoid discrepancies in their transactions. They arrived early and left late to ensure that the day's transactions balanced. Every minute counts when it comes to financial management and profit-making. Yet the pay was not commensurate with the work.

I returned to Nairobi and told my relatives and brother that I had decided to go for further studies in agriculture and environmental sciences. I went to my section head, Mr Singh, and told him the same. At my age, I considered myself young not to make banking my ultimate career. All my other colleagues were proceeding to higher education in UK, USA, Australia, India, and other countries. My brothers had also left for higher education abroad. It was clear that graduates did better socio-economically than Form Four or Form Six leavers. One stagnated career-wise if one did not progress academically. It is interesting to note that several people are now yearning for a second and third degree merely for promotions, prestige and higher earnings. That is the trend now in Kenya and many other countries.

My decision to quit the bank and proceed for higher education was a wise one. My hard work at Kisii High School and study technique there would pay dividends later in my university. The leadership traits and persistence added value to my future academic and research plans.

I wrote a formal resignation letter through my boss, Gurmit Singh, in which I explained why I wanted to quit. He was not amused. He had trusted and liked my work. He tried to persuade me to stay, but I kindly refused and told him that education took the first priority in a young nation like Kenya. The country needed expertise at all levels of development. He had no choice but to forward my letter to the human resources department. When my colleagues heard that I was leaving, they were not happy with the management. I mentioned to them that Barclays made immense profits through their dedicated work, and that they needed much more pay than what they were being given.

Later on, I learnt that there was a major bank strike which saw tremendous salary increase and other benefits. I kept in contact with my former colleagues but learnt that my section head, Mr G. Singh, had also left for the UK for some other assignment but not for the bank. Others also left for better opportunities.

My one-year stint in the bank was an eye opener. I was trained on various roles in public relations, confidentiality, book-keeping, business acumen, and most importantly, trust and confidence. I added these attributes to my earlier list during my high school days. I convinced everybody that I would study, make a career in agriculture and environment, with special emphasis on weed science and return home to work.

I had heard a lot about students who went abroad but never returned. My brother, Onami, saw my desire to continue with education and gave me support

to accomplish my goals. Meanwhile, my colleagues at the bank formed a strong union to fight for their rights. The Kenya Bankers Association, of which I was one of the initiators, was registered soon after my departure to negotiate for better terms and conditions of service. I had made friends with many of the staff and leaving them was saddening.

My Exit from Barclays Bank

Queensway Branch was considered the elite and headquarters of Barclays Bank. All the printing work was done there and decisions which affected other branches were carried out here. It is in the Central Business District of Nairobi. Staff who were posted there considered themselves more privileged than those in other branches.

I had an opportunity to say goodbye to them with a promise that I would return. We exchanged pleasantries, remembered the days when we trained in Limuru and agreed to push for better terms of service. A few of my customers were also invited to bid me farewell. I recall one staff telling me that she could also follow the same trend that I took, and go for further studies. I learnt later that Jessica left the bank for further studies in the UK.

I left Queensway Branch with a small balance in my account. Most of it was utilized for ledger fee. I never got a penny from that meagre saving! It was a great pleasure to work with this prestigious bank in a section which had a lot of implications for Kenya's future industrialization agenda. Business tycoons used to borrow money from the bank for capital and other developments.

Although I did not make any tangible mark in my first formal employment, I made friends, clashed with colonial remnants, planned my time well, made far-reaching financial implications on customers, displayed my work ethics and finally learnt how to manage my finances. I matured a little bit while working in this bank and had the privilege of decision-making. It was a worthwhile engagement which tested my responsibilities at my developmental stage. This was not a wasted effort.

The short experience would later on manifest in my future managerial assignments. I left the bank in December 1970. I worked for 16 days in December before I flew out to the USA and was able to earn my full month's salary before my departure. That made approximately one year of service.

I maintained my bank account in Queensway which had no balance but later opened an account in Westlands Branch. I occasionally visit the midtown branch and admire the same old wooden parquet floor upstairs where I worked. This was my first official job after my secondary school and I very much enjoyed working with the group of people of three races, the British, Asians and fellow Africans.

The flight to the United States of America

All paper work for my trip had been completed by my brother, Joel Onami, who was in New York then. He sent an admission letter, an air ticket and details of how to get to him once I arrived in New York City. I got my passport and visa, bought a few clothing with my last salary and booked the travel date.

There was no internet or cell phone then for fast communication. We communicated through surface mail and the occasional trunk call. I confirmed the travel dates using the Trans World Airlines (TWA). The airline had offices in Nairobi and flew direct to John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airport, with stops in Murtala Mohammed Airport, Lagos, Nigeria and Monrovia, Liberia. This was an excellent flight since I did not have to change planes en route. I had not been in any aircraft before. You can imagine my anxiety!

I had been told of heights, speeds, turbulence, vomiting, toilets, clouds and the blue skies. This was exciting for a young boy from rural Kisii, travelling abroad. I neither feared heights nor aircraft speeds. My brother H.T. made sure that all the paper work was in order. He and some of our friends took me to the airport. My sister, Grace Kemuma, and younger brother, Amenya, also came to see me off at the Embakasi Airport. We took a Kenya Bus to Airport and we talked all the way.

My family members bade me goodbye and moved to the visitors' waving bay where they had a full view of the aircraft I boarded. They waved to me from the waving bay as I climbed the stairs of the airplane. I reciprocated. We were many in the plane. This was a day flight which was scheduled to leave at 4 pm with a first stop in Lagos, Nigeria. I had now joined another world, another community, another class of people I did not know. I did not know how to behave with the many passengers aboard.

The airplane's huge doors were firmly locked after all the passengers got in. The flight crew guided us to the seats. I had a window seat and the normal flight formalities started. The medium of communication through the inbuilt address system was in English. Occasionally, I could not follow the instructions but would ask. The passengers were mainly from the USA and West African countries.

I sat next to a white American couple whom I later learnt were from Denver, Colorado, the Rocky Mountain State, as they told me. Good personality pays. I struck a conversation with them and discovered they had come to Kenya as tourists and for game hunting.

They later told me several bad and good things about the USA. They hinted on racial discrimination and were frank in telling me that I could encounter its ugly face in some parts of the US. I quickly recalled the Kisii High School shooting threat by one American Peace Corp. I learnt a lot from our interaction. When they learnt that I was destined for New York City, they even narrated to me in detail the good and the bad of the city.

New York City is considered one of the most sophisticated cities in the world in terms of people, class, affluence, entertainment, transportation and socio-economics. It compares with other major world cities like London, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Berlin and even Canberra in terms of lifestyles. That was the picture that was depicted of this great city. Mr and Mrs Meredith first told me that they actually had never been in NYC, but had heard good and terrible stories about it. It was a great city to visit but not to live in, they quipped.

New York City is fast and the people there are pushy, they stated. It has a population of about 12.0 million people. Many are rough and do not care about anybody or anything. They survive on fast foods and would do anything to make a dollar. There are many socio-economic problems which affect the black people and unlucky white ones. So I was to watch out for the company that I chose.

They, however, said that they had heard good things about the city. The city was the greatest in terms of job availability, movies, theatres on Broadway Avenue and great players. Times Square was in the heart of Manhattan. It was one of the busiest sections of NYC. It housed all types of commercial, social and transport systems/amenities. Very well-to-do people came here for various reasons. It had many great universities with world reputation. Many people longed to spend their summer time here because of numerous forms of entertainment.

It was home to world sports, boxing, world re-known performers and, most importantly, it had all nationalities from all over the world. It also had the best transportation system by bus, yellow taxis and subways. All world celebrities like movie stars, musicians, actors, ended up here. It was one of the most expensive cities in the world. Mr Meredith concluded his long talk by advising me to be careful about whom I chose as close friends once I joined the university with many other international students. In the past, New York City had a negative reputation due to robbery and drugs which were always highlighted in the media. It was at this point that the residents decided to create a positive image and called it the Big Apple. Positive praises began to promote its image, and this worked. Ultimately, the city had become the world's trading destination.

I was grateful for the free orientation, information and advice. By the time we finished our interaction, we were almost landing at Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos, Nigeria. We had dinner and beverages as we talked. The stopover in Murtala Mohammed Airport was for 45 minutes and we were not allowed to get out of the plane. I stretched a bit inside, peeped through the window, and saw the beautiful Lagos skyline. I had earlier watched the landscape and Atlantic Ocean from my window seat. The route from Nairobi to Lagos cut across several tropical countries of Africa and flew over Lake Victoria, the second largest lake in the world.

I was able to view the dense tropical forests of the Congo, Cameroon, and Central African Republic. I confirmed most of what I had learnt during geography lessons. Luckily, it was not cloudy during the flight and we gained time going

westwards. The pilot kept on briefing us on the major landmarks as we got into each country's airspace.

The Nigerians and some other nationals disembarked at Murtala Mohammed Airport and a few more people joined us. It was now getting darker and the flight from Lagos to Monrovia was at night. What was amazing to me was that the sun-downer appeared never to set like in my home country where there would be sudden nightfall. I learnt that we were gaining time as we proceeded further westwards. The plane touched down in Monrovia at about 8 pm and we had another 45 minutes stopover. I do not recall seeing anything great here, except a small airport with a few light posts. The pilots updated us all along the flight routes except when passengers were asleep.

New York City was to be our next landing point after Monrovia, Liberia. We took off at about 9 pm and had to fly over the Atlantic Ocean for nine non-stop hours to John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) Airport. This was the longest leg over the Atlantic Ocean. The captain told us just that and warned of possible turbulence. He talked of inter-tropical convergence zone as the main cause for the possible unstable flight. We were therefore advised to have our seatbelts on at all times while seated and avoid moving about in the cabin. Again, my geography lessons became useful when I heard of the tropical convergence zone.

This leg of the journey was long and many of us fell asleep aboard. There was, indeed, fierce turbulence midway the ocean. I must admit that they were rough and scary. We also encountered quite a number of these air pockets which made our flight uncomfortable. I cannot recall what I saw, but one continuous blue sky with a full moon and stars afar. I had a window seat throughout my trip and could see the outside outlines.

It was one boring continuous trip. As daybreak approached, we saw some islands as we approached our final destination, NYC. We landed safely at John F. Kennedy International Airport at about 1 pm. My friends had to connect to a local flight for Denver, Colorado. We exchanged addresses and they gave me their phone numbers for future contact. We bade each other goodbye. We all disembarked and had to clear as we went through immigration formalities. I hoped that my brother, Onami, would be waiting for me as earlier promised. I cleared through customs and immigration, collected my small luggage which was full of Kenyan dailies, *The Standard*, *Nation* and *Taifaleo* newspapers for my brother and his close friend, the late Joseph Magucha.

I stepped out on a cold, windy afternoon on December 1970. I had been warned of the cold weather. Luckily, my brother had brought a heavy, warm winter coat for me. They received me at the exit and we left the airport to his house in the Bronx. I looked outside and noticed graders scrapping snow from the highway. Joel and Magucha were excited to see a young Kenyan boy who would join them in the USA to study.

They were very inquisitive about the political situation and the latest happenings in Kenya. We kept on talking as we drove through traffic, but little did they know that I was more interested in seeing the landscape of NYC, the snow, buses, cars, than listening to their questions. My concentration was on sizing up the skyscrapers. I was sleepy but had to open my eyes and talk to two excited gentlemen. I compared the New York skyscrapers to the tall buildings in Nairobi; the comparison was not fair.

We arrived at my brother's apartment, 2011 Morris Avenue Apartment 7 C in the Bronx, one of the New York City boroughs (districts). Eleese, my brother's wife, welcomed me and I was sure she must have wondered how I survived the long trip from Kenya, East Africa, where she had never been before. We talked briefly.

My young nephew Terrence Mogaka was only two years old and we could not communicate. He was a young playful boy, who later became my best friend, associate and entertainer. He stared at me each time I spoke.

My sister-in-law was expecting her second baby, Thandi Moraa, and so she was careful regarding what she ate and how she carried herself in the apartment. She received me with respect and love as the young brother-in-law from Kenya. Her respect and admiration for my hard work and independence remain to this day. She must have had a brief from Onami. I therefore had a comfortable stay and became very helpful indeed as I minded my young nephew and later my new-born niece, Thandi Moraa. The two became my long-term buddies as I always minded them, walked them to a nearby kindergarten and we watched cartoons together.

I was not well-versed with the political events of Kenya though Joel, Magucha, his late wife Mary Nyaboke, and brother-in-law, Evans Keengwe, expected me to be a political expert. They seemed to be more informed in this matter than me despite their long stay in the USA. How did the group expect a young high school leaver to be so politically charged that I would narrate the day-to-day events concerning President Jomo Kenyatta, who later died in August 1978? As a local boy in Nairobi, all I did was to buy the dailies then read them casually. There might have been several political problems then, but I could not decipher the worst from the best in the government.

All I knew then was that we had a president who headed the Kenya African National Union (KANU), several members of parliament, and a very strong opposition led by the late Jaramongi Oginga Odinga. He was the Chairman of Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). The two parties were so powerful that the country was divided alongside party beliefs. One party, KANU, was affiliated to the western bloc and the other, KADU, to the Eastern bloc. More important at that time, also, was the fact that Kenya was an independent and sovereign state. Period. That was all I cared about.

My brother wanted me to explain in detail the latest happenings in East Africa and Africa as a whole. Those were the days when names like Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, Milton Obote, Jomo Kenyatta, Haile Sellasie, Kwame Nkrumah Mobutu Sese Seko, Muammar Gaddafi, Annuar Sadat, Joshua Nkomo, Samora Machel were household names on the African continent. I was aware of the struggle for independence, Pan-Africanism and the various movements across Africa. I knew that several African countries were getting their independence at different times.

I learnt one thing which remains a fact today: the Diaspora considered themselves more politically knowledgeable than those who resided on the African continent. They occasionally despised information of the local residents of their countries of origin. They considered themselves such know-it-all that they could judge from afar and prescribe the best solutions for a country. I thought they had plenty of time and meeting venues to assemble and analyse issues, which was a fact. There was nothing wrong with their ability to critique the developments in a given country, but they were also obliged to join their brethren in building their nations by giving tangible solutions.

They used to be African students gathering in several cities attacking various African presidents for their wrong deeds. But they would hardly come up with concrete suggestions as to the way forward!

As mentioned earlier, I arrived in the USA in winter, December 1970. I was told that it was one of the coldest months of the season. February was equally cold with freezing temperatures. I was further informed by my friends that March came like a lion and faded away like a lamb. It literally meant that March began with fierce snow storms, cold wind drifts and torrential rains. But it slowly calmed down as spring set in. I suffered the harsh, cold snow drifts whenever I was out. I will always recall this statement which was made by one of my colleagues as he was making us prepare for a harsher March month. He was also preparing us to acclimatize to the new environment.

After a few months of my stay in New York, I was advised to seek a part-time job as I waited to start college. Universities in the US commence in late August or September. A few accept students in March. I therefore had ample time to catch up on the slangs and twangs of the American accent. I must admit that I had difficulties following their accent, and I still do. They also had difficulties following my African accent; I imagine they still do. They actually thought that we were talking like the British toys that they used to watch on television. Perhaps that is why they would take keen interest in the British accent from foreign students. Anyway, we simply tolerated each other when it came to the wide differences in accents.

I was fast in learning directions, roads, avenues and blocks. I could walk my nephew and niece around several blocks and get them home safely. I slowly gained

courage to walk alone to the Bronx Zoo or to make telephone calls to a few familiar contacts. One thing I was told and advised against was being mugged or robbed by some street boys. I could be hurt in the process. I was advised to keep away from rowdy crowds and watch out for any strangers who would attempt to confront me.

The boroughs of Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn were the most notorious in drug peddling and robbery; I was advised. But this is true in all major world cities. In fact New York City was an excellent place to live in once someone got used to it.

I recalled my friends' lecture on the plane: New Yorkers are Pushers. The pace of work was just too fast for an average *rural* Kenyan. New Yorkers got agitated if one kept on saying "pardon me?". You were supposed to understand and follow conversations instantly. Period! Nobody wasted time on anybody. It was, indeed, survival of those who hassled most. I had no choice but to be fast enough and keep time and pace. My high school experience regarding time and adhering to deadlines started to bear fruits. I had to start preparing to begin college.

I was admitted at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, about 150 kilometres south of New York City. The transportation system in the USA is of high class, and the traffic laws work. My sister-in-law, Eleese, coached me on how to behave as a college student. They purchased for me the necessary personal effects and I was booked in one of the halls of residence in the campus. I shared a room with a first-year white student from Queens, one of the five boroughs of NYC.

After about six months living with my brother and his family, it was time to call it quits and start college life alone. I was now aware of my expectations, reactions to racial differences, keeping time and, most importantly, being on the good side of the law. I bought a meal card for use. Eateries were available at every corner or store one went to.

Junk food was and still is the most popular choice. I secured a part-time job as a receptionist in the Students' Centre. It was interesting to see the reactions of other students who found a typical African boy on a counter serving them. I worked for four hours daily, three days a week, during my free class periods. I was fast in networking and I got to know several students who became very helpful to me, and we actually formed study groups. They also assisted me in adjusting to the college and American life as I started to settle in Rutgers University.