

THANK YOU USAID OVC SCHOLARSHIP

I was born in a small village near Maseno University, when my parents Paul Collins Onyango and Dorsilla Awino had moved back home from Eldoret, where they had spent almost all their useful career lives. They decided to move closer home; in the words of my father 'To take care of his ailing mother'. They then began teaching in nearby Primary Schools both as head teachers. The village life was regular until Mum passed away in September 1996, just two months before I sat for my KCPE (final basic school exams). I finally sat my exams the same year and got impressive grades, which earned me a slot at The Aga Khan High School Mombasa. However, this did not materialize as I had to take care of my Father who was already ailing, I was therefore forced to join a nearby day school to enable me nurse Dad, a decision I blatantly protested against. Being the last born, I could not understand why I was the one to sacrifice a good education; while my other four siblings were comfortably furthering their education in Kisumu Polytechnic, Mombasa Polytechnic, Meru Teachers Training Collage and our first born already out of Kenyatta University and teaching at Migingo Girls High School! Two years passed by and Dad too passed away in March 1999.

After the burial, my Uncle Lazaro suggested that I join him in Mombasa so that I may take the opportunity I had missed earlier of joining my dream school, Aga Khan High School. I did not hesitate because that's what I had always wanted. Within no time, I joined Aga Khan High; what I didn't know was that I was actually going through what I would learn much later to be a bad condition called depression. This really affected my studies and relationships with both my peers and my relatives.

Just as I was recovering, my elder Sister Margaret passed away in May 2001, the year I was to write my final high school exams. She had been very instrumental in my life since the demise of my parents; she paid for my Fees and up keep. This further devastated my already torn life and greatly impacted on my final grades.

I graduated from Aga Khan with a Mean Grade of C plain; this enabled me get to Kenya School of Monetary Studies in 2002, to study Banking and Financial Services.

My Mum had an Education Policy for me, although the insurance company took many years to honor it; it might not have come at a better time, this is because it provided my

only ray of hope for a higher education, after my elder brother mismanaged both Mum and dad's death gratuity.

The policy was not much; it could only take me half way through College and with the help of a friend from my church, I got an attachment at The Kenya Power and Lighting Co in 2004, with a hope of getting a job there after. At KPLC, getting a permanent job was next to impossible, every time they advertised a vacancy, they needed a University graduate. I hated being told that I was not qualified for a job I had done effectively and diligently for close to one year; with a lot of anger in me, I told myself that I was going to do whatever it took to take myself back to high school, I had realized that without a good education, it was so easy to be a pauper and I just could not see myself being that!

I then started saving the little money I was being given for upkeep. I would skip lunch and sometimes dinner just to keep that extra coin for my project. I kept this project to myself for a long time. Not even my closest friend had an idea about my plans because I knew he would discourage me, my sister Maryanne, who is closest to me, learned about this long after I had gone back to school.

I managed to save Ksh 26,000, and embarked on a mission of looking for a school. I visited many schools but most of them declined my request. I was getting frustrated by how our systems were hush and actually not keen on giving people a second chance to better their lives. I had made a decision out of my own will and nothing was going to come between me and my education.

The search for a school was tough, and to be honest I was almost giving up; not on going back to school but, on getting a school. I had a plan B of private studies had my earlier plans fail.

I then visited Mang'u High School in Thika; I had high hopes that the Head of Guidance and Counseling would listen to my story. When I approached her she was so touched by my request and quest to get an education that she asked me to give a motivational talk to her students. I was humbled by the request and I actually saw myself as a role model even before the project began.

She rallied her students for my talk the following day; invited for the talk were the school Principal, the deputy principal and other teachers. The talk went on well with all the students and almost all teachers present. This was the beginning of my acceptance in

Mang'u High School community. Everyone including the students was so receptive of me; they genuinely opened the doors of success for me into a better life. They not only embraced me as one of their own but also recognized that I needed special attention which every one was ready to offer a hand in.

I had been out of school for five years, within which time the syllabus I did back then had changed; I had a great task of going through form one's work to form four's work in just under a year! The teachers went out of their way in ensuring that I was at par with the rest of the students, by giving me extra attention, most of the times past mid night and over the weekends. So far this was the hardest test of my life but, I managed to score a B minus in the final exams.

My life had been flipped within one year, thanks to this strong determination; I could now join the University. I aggressively began looking for sponsors to help take me through University, even if it meant paying them back. I had gone to bury a friend of mine whom I was really close to; I had committed myself so much to the family in helping with the logistics and mobilization during the whole funeral period, that I won the heart of the deceased's elder sister, So she asked me what I did; I narrated to her what I had done and what I was planning to do.

The next thing she told me was to write to the US Ambassador telling him exactly what I had told her! I drafted the letter the same day and hand delivered it to the Embassy two days later after I came back to the city. Incidentally I had included all the documents required, the Death Certificates, Birth Certificate, Testimonial both from my Priest and a well worded recommendation letter from the Principal of Mang'u High School.

I got a call from Mr. Gitonga of USAID the following day around 9am informing me that I had been awarded a full scholarship to a University of my choice in Kenya.

Luck had knocked on my door! And like 'normal' people, I had an opportunity to be in charge of my destiny. I had been given a second chance in a big way, to be what I had always dreamed of becoming. I had never been that happier in my whole life.

I then joined United States International University in May 2008 to pursue International Business Administration Concentrating in Finance; since then, many opportunities have continued coming my way, for example; early this year I represented the University in a conference in Harvard University, Massachusetts USA.

I was entrusted by the University in June this year to Plan and Lead a Delegation of 60 Students for a trip in Rwanda; I also sit in the panel of Dean Advisors.

I was crowned the most Responsible Student for the year 2009.

Looking forward; I see more opportunities on the way; the school has for instance singled me for an exchange programme in Lincoln University USA next fall, an opportunity that will help mold me into a global rounded person through multi-cultural appreciation and understanding.

I honestly have no words to thank USAID for this rare opportunity; I am honored to be a USAID Scholar.

On behalf of my community I say “May God Bless the American people.”

Boniface Otieno

USIU -AFRICA.