

A Living Success: How I got to campus

Narshion's own story, The First SCA Child

In Africa, particularly native Kenya, in the villages, the sunrise each morning is welcomed by wails and cries of children, wondering domestic poultry and mostly worried mothers and fathers preparing to face the challenges of the day. This menace, the equivalence of the modern society's morning rush, has very devastating effects. It concludes with most of the children in the playing fields & whereabouts swallowed by the comforts of hand-made mud huts and vast green vegetation in the glittering day light. It's not that there are no schools. Many a times, the single mothers, unemployed fathers, uncles, grand and great parents can only afford a fist-size token of staple food Ugali and tasteless but vitamin friendly vegetables. The cost of education is beyond their reach and due to this; they make 'life comfortable' at the level of their ability. It was in this menace that the SCA charity picked me up.

My mother had struggled to put me to school. She was single, working at other peoples' farms for a fee but mostly relied on selling cheap local brew at our hut. Being the last born, I suffered most at the expense of my brother and sister. I spent weeks at home to pave way for my siblings to attend school as 'I was youngest'. My fellow boys (who went to school) would pass by our home in the evening and through them I would know what was taught at school that day. During the day, I used to be with my mother; assisting her in her odd jobs: making thatching materials (makuti), collecting firewood for sale, and of course preparing the local brew for drunkards who came in the evenings.

I used to assist my mother in the selling of the brew (a bottle would go for KES 20 or USD ¼). At that time, my mother used to drink uncontrollably. I would collect the money from the drunkards, issue them their balances and give our gross and net sales to my elder brother who was all the time reading or preparing for the following days school work. I grew to be faithful with money, believe me, you cannot steal when you know from experience that, that is all that keeps you alive. I wouldn't sleep until I made sure that my mother, either drunk or not, has retired to bed. I loved her and didn't want her to be hurt. Life at this stage was very hard. Some drunkards caused havoc just to disturb my single mother and as we were young (me and my siblings), there was nothing we could do but cry. I loved this woman; she sacrificed her life for us. At this time, my elder sister went to leave with relatives in another part of the country and my elder brother got sponsorship at the school we were. I was the only unlucky lad. But, how did I

manage to get to the next class at the end of each year? Simple. I loved books. Each evening I made it my duty to know what my colleagues had been taught that day. On weekends, I would borrow their books and read. When the exams came, I would ask my mother to plead to the headmaster to allow me do the exams. The headmaster then would allow me to sit for the exams only. I would not get my result slips as I hadn't paid the fees. I used to be top of the class. My name used to be called on the closing day as having got first position and everyone clapped for me. I thank God I had good friends, who wanted me to continue learning and offered me their books to read while at home.

One morning when I was in primary seven (standard seven), two English ladies came to our class. I had gone to school that day. The headmaster told us that they were going to select children to pay fees for (sponsor). I was among the selected as the whole school knew of my dilemmas. Coincidentally, my elder brother was clearing primary school and his sponsorship had just been terminated. The sponsor (a German) discovered that the school management was corrupt and so he quit. About two hundred and fifty children left school and almost the entire class 8 (final class in primary) never proceeded to secondary education. My brother was in this group. I felt bitter, only one or two men in the management had caused the lives of hundreds to be doomed in utter poverty and ignorance (I believed and still do that education is for a bright future, any man who leaves it suffers a great loss). This was the end of my brother's schooling. I will never forget the pain we felt as a family (especially my mother as she had hopes in him). However, I have forgiven the people who caused it. Hey, I was telling you how I met the two English ladies. They were going to sponsor me! They promised never to go away, they would help with my learning and that meant for the first time in seven years I would attend school throughout the term. This was history to me. I said YES. The ladies were Madam Maureen McIntyre and Madam Sue Stephens.

The year that followed is one of the most difficult in my life. My biological father had reunited with us but had little contribution to our economy. He was a fish dealer. In that first term my parents travelled to Lamu (200 km from home). My father believed that was where he would get fish cheaply for his business. Unfortunately they spent all the money and could not afford even the transport to come back home. My brother and I survived on food from kind neighbors and distant relatives. Then came the real problem. I needed money to register for the National Examination. My friends registered for the exams and I was left out. I remember crying as I went home. I had worked hard all those years only to miss out on registration. My mother had told me that education was for the rich but had disagreed but now I got it painfully. I had always relied on the exams

because I knew they were keys to the next stage of learning. Since I would not be able to do the final exams, I knew it was my end. I had to forget school. I was a bright student but as I begun my story, every sunrise in this part of the world brings wails and cries. Everyone struggles with their own challenges of the day. I left school.

My story would have ended here if it were not for my greatest friend Madam Maureen. She came at around June of that year, 1999. She had organised a charity organisation in the name SCA (Samson Chivatsi Appeal aka Sponsored Children Appeal). The headmaster came to the village looking for me. He found me playing football in the fields. I told him in his face that I wasn't going to his school again. He went to persuade my mother. That evening, my mother talked to me kindly. She told me that the white people from the west had come and that we (mostly I) had the choice of trying them. She persuaded that I had diligently wanted to learn and this was an opportunity – a final one. I agreed.

At school I met Madam Maureen who expressed her love to me motherly and the fear left me. I still feel her first embrace – warm and assuring. She expressed to me her pity that I would not be sitting for the final exams that year. However, she cleared all my fee arrears and assured me that I would not be disturbed with fees again. She also reminded me that she would not leave me, she even gave me her personal postal address to write to her directly should I encounter any problems. She became my great friend because she opened her heart for me to see the love she had for children like me. At the end of that year, I won the first Academy award. It was organised by SCA. The award is given to the best pupil overall.

The charity had not thought of what next after primary, (this problem is still experienced until the secondary school shall be completed). Maureen had to ask our sponsors for a little more of their donations so that we can be advanced to secondary. I remember her telling me that she had to use her own savings at some point to help with the secondary school fees. The following year we joined secondary school enthusiastically. On my first day at secondary, I told myself that I am going to have my first day in the university as well in the near future. I was determined from the first day and the result slips reflected my ambitions. I wanted to be a Pilot then.

Over the years, I became very close with Madam Maureen. She would take us to the Hotel when she had a day off and we would enjoy swimming and playing. My closest friend Omar and I became as her own children as we were virtually free and affectionate. She loved us because we were working hard at school.

At form four, the final year in secondary, I lost both of my parents. They died in a span of two months. My Father in April and my Mother in June. I was disoriented as I had spent weeks nursing them. It was not until July when I settled from the funerals. Time had moved and I was left with less than two months to start the final exams. I knew my mother was no longer with me and had no one apart from my jobless brother and the books! I was now an orphan. I had nothing to inherit. In fact, my third term fees were spent during the funerals. Madam Maureen had to send other monies for fees. When the results were announced in the New Year, I had passed very well, with a B+ qualifying me for University education. I cried with joy.

Today, I am an orphan but a happy one. When the sun rises, I no longer cry (as I used to when everyone was going to school except me). There is no one who worries about my challenges of the day (save it for Maureen who is there for me). I am in the university pursuing Bachelor of Science in Information and Communication Technology & Management. I opt to specialize in Software Engineering. I am going to be a Programmer, a Systems analyst and an ICT consultant whichever pleases my choices. This is the bright future I dreamed of when I used to read borrowed notes from friends as I couldn't afford to be in class.

I am the first product of SCA charity. All the parents, teachers and students in the village see in me a great hope, their future leader and most important a living success of the vision and mission of the charity that they all hold dear.

Believe me, I am just the first. When I look behind me, I see countless boys and girls with intellectual abilities far greater than mine. All these are in the hands of the charity – SCA. They work hard because they know someone out there is sacrificing to pay for their fees. They have hopes of tomorrow because they know they are being enlightened by an education.

May I comment on the African leadership style and corruption. Since life here presents unfair opportunities, those in authority want to reap heavily and cross over the poverty line. When they do this, they forget or don't care for those that will be affected. However, I strongly believe that despite these traits, there are a few (am one of them) who are able and can help carry the work on. I have suffered this problem before and I can't let it happen when I can do something. I would like to thank Madam Maureen and the Charity in general for having proved the test of time. I know it has not been easy but YOU have continued fighting this enemy and above all you have always been "on our side" as the children that

would have suffered the wrath. As SCA children, we say that WE ARE READY TO SERVE and have the work of educating poor children continue so that they can have a future.

Lastly, I know the charity picked me from the mud fields. Without them I wouldn't be where I am today. My wish to my readers is that if you are in a position to touch an African heart, please don't hesitate. Of all my classmates and age mates from the same village at home (a slum population of about 50,000 families), I am the only (local) who is in the university. I am here because the charity is still paying for my education. Currently there are over two hundred boys and girls in high school sponsored by the charity and are hoping to join campus one day. Their future is in the hands of those who pay their fees. I love my people, I love the people who are helping us go to school and it is my humble prayer that the work will go on. Thank you.

NARSHION.