

IF IT IS NOT RAFIKI THABO, WHO ELSE?



Some 27 years ago, I happened to come into this world and unfortunately enough into a community that adores traditions and customs. This community believed and still believes, even though we are in a modern era, that those children born and whom the father is not known are outcasts.

My mum being the only bread winner as a house wife in the capital city had to leave me in this hostile community at a tender age of 6 months.

My grandmother, who by then was the only person who accepted me, had a very hard responsibility of making sure that I got at least the basic needs, How she did it has never been explained to me because it was miraculous.

Although I struggled with malnutrition, I still grew up in character and stature anyway and at the age of 6 years, my desire for education began.

It was hard to convince my grandmother that I needed to follow my fellow village children to a nearby nursery school where they attended. This was because of three reasons; the first one being that no one in the family could show what education had done to them because they were all school drop outs, secondly was that my grandmother didn't see the value for education because she had never stepped in a classroom and lastly there were no resources to cater for my education.

These three reasons could not be a justification, according to me, to why I should not get access to education. One day, I woke up very early and tried to trace where other children go for school. The first day I got lost, but later I was

found in a far shopping centre. The following day I did take the same step. This time round, I found myself in the Nursery school compound.

Because I wasn't a pupil there, I could not be allowed in class and therefore I waited for break time to intermingle with those pupils who did not understand what stigmatization meant. Few stigmatized me for my fatherless condition by calling me MWANAHARAMU (Kiswahili word for a child born out of wedlock). I didn't take them serious anyway.

There was something unique about break time in rural nursery schools. This is the time children used to take their cup of porridge. Because I was not in that program, leave alone not having a cup, the teacher in charge used to allow me to take the remnant in cooking pot and make sure that I wash the utensils.

I did this for a few days. Later the teacher asked me to be attending classes but mine will just be listening, no class work nor exams. This was a breakthrough for me. When others were doing exams and class work, I could just watch.

My mum having seen my interest, struggled and enrolled me in the said school. I did my primary school while holding various leadership positions in student's fraternity. I was the youngest debating prefect in the school just to name but one.

Things turned worse again when I was in class six. My mother could no longer support my education. Because of this unpleasant situation, I decided to gain cobbler's skills from one old man who did shoe making at our market place. Every evening I could go there just to watch how he does it and after a week I had gained the skill. This skill made me famous in the village because I spared

my village dwellers the hassle of going to the market whenever they needed the cobbler's service.

Every evening after school I could find several pairs of shoes waiting my service at home. This enabled me raise some cash for my education. Besides this, I also developed a skill of making ropes from sisal fibre. I could sell them to farmers and those who needed them for thatching tradition houses. All this earned me some money that really helped me in my primary education. Having completed my primary education, the little debt I had with the school was forfeited in my favor. I then got a letter to join secondary school.

This is now the time I got a bitter test. Some of my friends incited me to confront my mother to tell me who my father is so that he may take responsibility of my education. I did not listen to their advice because I realized my mother decided that I should live. There were others who decide to abort in such circumstances but that never rang in my mother's mind.

After having stayed a full term without going to school, my mother requested me to join her in Nairobi where she stayed. I was so happy because at the back of my mind I knew she had found a school for me.

One of my Aunts who had come home for a holiday volunteered to pay my fare to Nairobi. When I arrived in Nairobi, my mother had organized a casual job in a building site for me. For the first time I differed with her and told her all I wanted was Education. She was so upset. She borrowed a loan from a friend, sent me to town with another gentleman to look for a school and purchase uniforms. We got a school in town which to me seemed to be in the business of making money. We paid a half of that term's fee and got back home.

My mum stayed very far from town. This therefore made commuting very hard for me. I then decided to stay with a relative who stayed bit closer to the town. When I was to join form two, my mother got into serious financial problems. She could no longer raise the school fees. This did not stop me. I made friends with those in various secondary schools, got their notes and exams and did my studies at home. I then booked exams as Private candidate did it and passed.

I had interests in media studies, Medicine and business courses. When my results come out, thirst for education made me embark on the most hated job in Nairobi. That is garbage collection. I used to collect plastics materials and sold them in the nearest industrial area's recycling firms. I did this for almost a year and managed to raise some money to start me off in the college.

I enrolled for a 3 year Diploma course in Accountancy at Kenya Technical University. I managed to complete this course successfully and started internship at Kenya Institute of Special Education after one year.

After, my diploma course, I approached one of our local banks for a loan to pursue my degree program since I had enrolled at KCA University for a course in business. The bank declined on the grounds that I was not employed and therefore I lacked collateral but then I managed to raise a little through well wishers.

Because this amount could not pay even a half of the fees, I tirelessly prayed to God to bring a friend my way to sort me out. It didn't take long; God brought a friend by the name RAFIKI THABO FOUNDATION in my life through Rev. Mwanganyĩ.

Rafiki Thabo has really transformed my life. I am the first person in my Mothers' whole extended family with a degree. My graduation in November 2013 was a shock to many. This has made me gain my respect. I am no longer the fatherless boy the community used to see. My family members, including but not limited to, my uncles, cousins and aunties, now consult me on various family issues. In other words those who asked me WHO ARE YOU? Are now asking Me HOW ARE YOU?

This Foundation is a true blessing to me. I therefore asked myself how can I reciprocate this gesture? It took me some weeks to get an answer to this question. The answers come in a form of a question; if this foundation has been a blessing to me, why should I not be a blessing to it and others? I vowed not to be a bystander. B2B immediately rang in my mind. So I decided to sell the idea of B2B (BLESSED 2 BLESS) to some of my fellow beneficiaries in Kenya and I believe with proper strategies in place we are going to touch a person in need somewhere in a way within our means.

To all donors, I would like to extend my most sincere thanks to you for reaching out to people like me with your resources, given the economical hardship. Your involvement in bettering our lives can never go without being noticed. Thank you for truly making a difference in us.

And for the brains behind Rafiki Thabo Foundation (TRUSTEES), I am so grateful for your good stewardship. You always have made sure that the donors' resources are channeled to the correct and genuine projects. Giving your time and ideas for this calling will never go without being noticed. You are such a blessing.

AYIESA N. OHESE, KENYA.