

## **Life Changing Experiences**

**By Given Kachepa**

### **My parents' death**

#### **Earliest memories**

My earliest memories of life begin in the early 1990's. I remember feeling loved by both my mother and father. Even though my parents had separated, and were living in separate houses, dad used to come to our house where my six siblings and I lived with our mother. I remember mom being a very reserved person. She had a few trusted friends in the neighborhood, but other than that she was not one to go out and try to be a social person. She was a strict disciplinarian. Every time I did something stupid and my mom found out, I was sure to get an African spanking. I was the youngest boy of my 2 older brothers and I also had two older sisters and one younger sister. So I was just about the right age for doing a lot of dumb things. Even though my mom was a strong disciplinarian and gave me a lot of spankings I still loved her and have a lot of fond memories of our short time together. My mom used to give what I call "scissors" haircuts. She would sit me between her two legs and give me a haircut. Even though I hated it at the time, it's one of my fondest memories of me with my mother. She used to sew everything by hand. If my pants had a hole in them my mom would patch it up. If I needed a sweater for school my mom bought cotton at the local market and sewed one for me instead of spending money to buy a new one. Today because of what I learned from my mother, if I buy new pants and they need hemming I just get a needle and thread from home and try to fix it myself. If my pants have holes in them, I patch them up by adding a new extra fabric from the inside of the pants. These are the things I learned from my mother that will stay with me during my life time on this earth. And now that I'm older and realize just how similar my reserved personality is to my moms, there is no doubt from whom I got my personality traits.

My dad, unlike my mother, was more outgoing. He was a very social person and liked to hang out with his friends at the local market playing "so-olo", a traditional African game that women hated because men lost lots of money on this additive game. My father was very caring to me and my siblings. Because we didn't live in the same house after my parents' divorce, sometimes a few days or even a whole week would go by without seeing him; in this case my father would hand money to my friends so they could give it to me when they saw me. Twice he came out to watch me play soccer with my friends at the local soccer field. One of the times I busted my big toe trying to impress to him with my soccer skills. In Africa, at least from what I remember, it is very unusual for parents to go watch their kids play soccer the number one sport in Zambia. My father was passionate about school. He wanted to make sure all his kids got an education. One of the fondest memories with him was him walking me to school for my first day of the first grade and him telling me to stand up for myself if any one picks on me. When it was time for the show grounds my father always made sure we all had the money to go. He was known for his charisma and his nickname was "big voodoo" (someone who likes to stir things up).

Even though we did not live in a fancy house, I still enjoyed my life at home. I enjoyed mom's company at night. I enjoyed story telling times we had as a family. I remember one night not being able to go to sleep after my brother Cephas told the story that one day it will get dark and

sun will never come out again. As a 4 or 5 year old I was terrified and couldn't go to sleep that night. I enjoyed having brothers and sisters that I loved with my whole heart, and love at its core has never felt so good for me.

### **My parent's deaths**

Sometime in the early 1990's when I was in the second grade at Kalingalinga primary school my mom became sick. She was taken to UTH (University Teaching Hospital of Zambia) hospital by several family members including my aunt Margret and others. When they returned from the hospital I just remember people crying and not knowing what was going on. My father came home that night and I remember him giving me a hug, telling me everything would be fine, and telling me to go to Aunt Margret's house across the street to spend the night.

Then in 1994, approximately 2 years after my mother had died, my father became sick while living with him Kalingalinga. Since we did not have enough money to take him to a modernized hospital, my father found a local witch doctor that prescribed him cultural herbs to drink every night as part of his treatment plan. None of the treatment he was receiving from the witch doctors in Kalingalinga healed his hiccups or whatever other illness he was facing, so my grandmother suggested he come to the village where she was staying so she could care for him. My father was transported to Chongwe where he later died. I helped build his coffin behind grand moms' African hut house. He was buried in an open field village with a few other local villagers buried in that same location. We put a glass cup and metal plate on the ground to mark his grave site.

### **Lessons learned**

The most difficult thing to deal with after my parents died was adjusting to life without them. How was I supposed to live in this world without people that I loved, idolized, admired, and trusted? Who was going to be there to defend me if I needed someone to stand up for me, who was going to make me feel as safe as I felt in my mother's arms or dad's conversations? Who was going to prepare my meals, wash my clothes, take me to the hospital, comb my hair, or go to school with me to pick up my school report?

Having a little sister at home made me want to do something to help her because I did not want to see her suffer. When my parents were around I never thought or even dreamed about trying to find money to help her or any of my other siblings. After their deaths, I made a conscious decision to do whatever it took to make sure I could help her if she needed anything. Today I continue to work because I care for my brothers and sisters and the community which I left 13 years ago.

### **How I adjusted**

Realizing the future was never going to be like the past, I vowed to myself to remain in school and try to do something to change my future. After school at night I sold paraffin in my compound of Kalingalinga going on foot from house to house shouting, "Paraffin" to earn some money. During the day I crushed stones with a hammer laboring for weeks but only to sell that rock for 2 dollars after about 2 weeks' worth of work. Other times I stood at the bus station waiting to carry produce for women coming from downtown who could not manage to carry their own stuff into compounds from the station. This was a tough job because I was competing with other kids who were a lot bigger than me and thus were more likely to charge in front of the line

to get the job. In addition if goods weighed too much, the women picked someone that they knew could manage to carry it to their house without breaking down on the way.

### **Who I lived with after parent's deaths**

After my parents died my six siblings and I moved in with my aunt Margret in two her two room house with no electricity or running water. My aunt Margret was married and had six children including 3 boys and 3 girls. The living conditions were packed as we had 14 people trying to share a two room house. We slept right next to each other on the floor. Food was also scarce because no one had a financially stable job to support us. As a result each family member was expected to work and contribute whatever money he or she raked up doing piece work (part time jobs). One of the darkest moments of my life was after my sister Grace died and there was no money to help buy her coffin. So each family member was asked to go out before the funeral to find work so we could buy her a coffin.

These early moments were defining moments for my life because they taught me how to be self sufficient. I learned that if I was going to make anything out of myself I had to work hard. Life is hard for any of us, but when you are an orphan you don't know how to deal with it other than to live your life and try to survive in the circumstance that you found yourself.

### **Joining the choir and my Christian faith**

My Christian faith has carried me in both good and bad times. The day I accepted Jesus in Zambia I can remember going home from church wishing my life would end so I could go to heaven. My Christian faith has been the foundation upon which everything that has happened in my life has been built. My Christian faith led me to joining the Zambian Acapella Boy's Choir. Joining the choir was a life changing experience because it gave the peace and friendships I needed after being orphaned losing my parents and older sister. In addition it gave me the opportunity to come to the United States of America. And because of this I have been educated and have had the opportunity to help my Zambian family financially.

I joined the choir at a time when I was spiritually lost. In Kalingalinga, I was hanging out with the wrong crowd and everything was falling down. Then in 1996 my cousins Richard and Mophat encouraged me to join the Zambian Acapella Boys' Choir, ZABC 2. I joined the choir after three weeks of preliminary church and choir rehearsal attendance. The normal waiting time was three months, but my persistence, hard-work, and commitment paid off. Joining the choir diverted my attention from hanging out with friends that were un-ambitious and had no goals in life. Joining the choir brought back some of the inner peace I had lost after my parents died. On Sundays I enjoyed going to church Bible studies in the mornings and evenings. I enjoyed being picked to read the Bible verse in Sunday School. Every Wednesday we also had evening Bible studies at various church members' homes in the community which gave me the opportunity to get to know a lot of people. When I was going through a hard time my friends from church prayed for me, this helped me recover from whatever struggle quickly because I knew I had people who cared. When my oldest sister died in 1998 the choir came to my house and sang at the funeral. I was humbled to know that I mattered enough for them to come to my sister's funeral to sing.

With the Zambian Acapella Boy's Choir, we sang at funerals in the community, went to various choir competitions, sang in church on Sundays; this gave me something to look forward to every single day of my life. At night I went to choir rehearsals after school. The church became such a

part of my life I started sleeping there to save room at Aunt Margret's house for someone else because of the crowded living conditions there. In a way, sleeping at the church meant we acted as guards protecting the church building from being broken into at night. At church we slept on wooden chairs as we organized 8 or 10 chairs side by side to form a bed shape sleeping area with no mattress.

In addition because I started going to church, my family later became active members of Highland Baptist Church after I left Zambia. My aunts and cousins and many friends also began singing in the local church at Highland Baptist Church. The church has been in existence since the early 1990's and has made many contributions to the community.

While singing with the Zambian Acapella Boy's Choir in Kalingalinga, I learned about other Zambian Acapella groups in the United States that were singing to raise funds for schools in Zambia. However, the extent of my knowledge of exactly what they were doing was limited. It was limited because I was not close friends with any choir members in the United States. However, the thought that I might get the same opportunity of going to America to sing to raise funds for disadvantaged children in my compound was an incredibly appealing thought to me. In Zambia many children dropped out of school because of the many economic challenges that they are faced with at home. Many of these children have to drop out of school to go fetch for money so they can feed themselves or help their siblings. At my elementary school in Kalingalinga I witnessed many friends with so much potential all the sudden stop coming to school because of the lack of support

Then in 1998 TTT, Partners in Education came to Zambia looking for a different choir to replace an older group after their 18 months tour in the United States was completed. I, of course, was ecstatic as the selection process began to pick 12 boys from a 64 member mass choir. The selection process was based on the quality of voice, behavior, work ethic, none under the age of 12, and no related siblings. I made the cut although 2 other cousins competed for the same spot. After the selection process we practiced even harder to get ready for the upcoming tour. In addition we started gathering paper work to get ready for our trip. (I didn't know at the time that it was unusual for visas etc to process so quickly. I now know the pockets of people were being padded to make things happen fast.) Every group member above the age of 16 was issued the Zambian Registration Card, equivalent to the American Social Security Card. After those were issued we then went to the Zambian Embassy to get our passports. Our families signed papers to release us to come to the United States. (All documents were written in English so none of us or our families really knew what the papers said). My passport said I was 11; they changed ages of choir members to make us appear to be younger). To parents the hopes of a better life far outweigh the risks of traveling far away and so they let their children go when the promises sound so good. Traffickers prey on the lack of education, language and communication barriers. Contractual agreements are confusing and futile.

In Zambia, it is easy to convince people with hopes of a better life and future. Who would not want to come to America? When you live on less than a dollar per day, America is heaven. TTT, Partners in Education told us we were volunteers. They said our work would help build schools in Zambia, pay our families a monthly income, and give us a stipend and an American education while in the U.S. Our choir was specifically promised a school in Livingstone, Zambia. The school would be the place we would continue our education after finishing the tour in the United States.

I now better understand why my choir never really knew what happened to ZABC 1 while they were on tour. (1996-1998) The ministry told us not to talk to any of those returned choir

members “because they had been disobedient and disrespectful”. They told the members of ZABC 1 in the US at the time that “the good choir was coming to replace them.” There was a “line in the sand” drawn so we never talked to each other in the compound.

The promises were deceptive and false. The school in Livingstone was never built. Our families received only 20 dollars a month for eighteen months. The only school we attended in the United States was after 9 months being on tour and the American government forced the ministry to provide the education. We did not receive the promised salary. We did not know where all of the money was going that we saw in love offerings and selling CD's. If I inquired about money or school, Bible scriptures on obedience and respect were embellished to shame me.

In the United States, we were not allowed to visit with any of the other choirs from our community even though we were friends and some members had brothers in another choir. Our bags and clothes were searched after each tour. We were not allowed to have any person's (especially host families where we stayed while on tour) contact information. We had no contact with our families. We were not allowed to keep our own passports. We could not complain to anyone about anything except to the ministry. Such complaining brought threats of deportation, being sent home disgracing our families. We were the promise of hope when we were selected to be in the choir and people expected a lot from us when our tour was over. We were not allowed to have pocket money. We sang 4 -7 concerts a day. After each concert we asked for a love offering and sold CDs.

If a choir member could not sing because of sickness he was seen as disobedient and was threatened with deportation (sent home in disgrace meaning bringing shame to your family). We had been warned against escaping because we would be caught and deported. Many days we woke around 4:30 a.m. to travel to sing. I remember one time feeling so exhausted that I just sat down to rest. The trafficker came over to me and stood me up holding my shirt collar saying, “Sing boy, I told you to sing.” His voice was full of anger and I was scared. At the home base, we cooked and did laundry regardless of how excruciating our schedule was. Our suffering was both psychological and physical.

TTT asked if we would like to have a swimming pool at home base. When we replied favorably, we were forced to help hand dig a swimming pool with picks and shovels in July Texas heat. Sometimes I felt like a puppet on string being moved around. We sang in churches, schools and malls. We sang an estimate of 20 concerts a week. My passport said I was 11 and this was exhausting work.

In April of 1999, the main TTT person died and his daughter and son-in-law carried on the “ministry”. After a few weeks, TTT contacted the police and then immigration to have 4 choir members removed in April 1999. Besides losing my parents, seeing my friends in handcuffs being harassed was one of the most uncertain and scariest moments of my life. I was scared because I didn't know if my fate would be the same. Only a few days after the four boys had been picked up, the remaining seven of us decided to stay in the United States. It was better to keep hope than face the scrutiny and shame of returning to Zambia without anything. The United States Department of Labor got involved and demanded the ministry pay us. A lawsuit was filed on behalf of 67 choir members for \$500,000. TTT, Partners in Education then began to furnish a monthly income, but retained most of our money for our expenses, such as house rent, school, electricity, food, and my airline ticket home. I had about forty dollars per month left.

In January 2000 we demanded the money that TTT owed us. We were tired of the threats, the grueling schedule, and the lack of meals (the gas stove was turned off so we could not cook if we refused to sing). We made a group decision to go home rather than being deported. It seemed better for our reputation. The same INS agent that picked up our 4 friends came to pick us up and I was rescued and taken to First Baptist Church in Colleyville, Texas. I was then given the opportunity to stay in the United States of America on deferred action status to testify against my traffickers if necessary. I'm thankful to the INS for giving me the opportunity of the life I have today.

Although this experience did not turn out to be what I thought, it taught a good lesson in life, to always be optimistic about life and persevere. Life is a challenge for all of us, but it is how we chose to deal with it that matters. Although it did not turn out to be what I wanted, I thank God it happened because it gave me the opportunity to witness to people in the United States about Jesus Christ and in the process, many people learned about Zambia. As a result many missionaries from the United States and elsewhere in the world have gone to Zambia on mission trips because of the work of Zambian Acapella Choirs.

### **Coming to USA**

In the year 2000 after we parted ways with TTT Partners in Education, we had nowhere to go. When the INS agent, Sal Orrantia, who was investigating the ministry, came to pick us up from the ministry, he was going to put us in jail if he could not find a place for us to stay. Mr. Orrantia had somehow heard about the people at First Baptist Colleyville Church and their involvement with the Zambian Acapella Choirs. Mr. Orrantia contacted the church to see if they would be interested in hosting 7 boys for an unspecified amount of time. Mr. Orrantia spoke to Neal Choate, and Neal Choate called my now mom Sandy Shepherd. That same night, the seven of us boys ended up to the Shepherd's house in Colleyville. My father was out of town on a business trip and Shelly was a senior in high school. At the Shepherd's house we were scared because we did not know who to trust and had no idea what the ministry could try to do. Sandy had volunteered with TTT for 2 years but had not seen my choir perform. She had tried but had not been able to convince authorities, even the FBI, that the ministry was not treating us right. Sandy called a few of her friends to come over to her house our first night there to help make us feel more comfortable and protect herself from seven boys whom she didn't know much about. Every night she set the house alarm fearing the TTT employees might come and retaliate with our moving from their ministry.

Out of concern for our safety, my mom began calling people from the church to see if they could host the guys temporarily. Within a few weeks she found temporary homes for all 7 boys. Later she found permanent houses for all the boys which was a grueling process to get people to commit to keeping a boy on a permanent basis of whom they did know much about. In a few cases some of the boys flew out to these families house for a week to see if things would work out before the final move. In addition it took lots of time and energy for my mother on the phone calling these families and convincing them to agree. During our time in Colleyville, Sandy took us to the mall and found part times jobs for us around the community. She would drive us to these part time jobs and later come to pick us up. She bought all of our food, paid for gas, and all of the other expenses we had. She drove us to down town Dallas to file for adjustment of status from P3 visa to deferred action status, helped get paper work processed and stood by us as we all got required immunizations. She helped us write our required depositions which was an emotionally draining process for most of the boys.

Eventually I went to live in Childress, Texas with my cousin Richard but later returned to visit the Shepherd house after my cousin Richard left Childress. While on this visit to the Shepherd's house, Donna Korthals, the lady I was living with in Childress wrote me a letter saying she could not keep me anymore because of her health reasons. It was during this time that the Shepherd's offered me the opportunity to stay and enroll in school since I was young and needed a place to be. My understanding was that this was not a permanent offer. It depended on how everything would work out. Never the less, I was humbled by the offer and decided to work my tail off in school so I could succeed.

Joining the Zambian Acapella Boy's Choir was a life changing experience because it gave me the opportunity to come to the United States of America. In the United States I have been educated and have been blessed with a new American family. And in return, I have been able to help my Zambian family financially. Coming to the United States has given me an American family which has embraced me and given me the love and support I have always been looking for. My American mom, Sandy Shepherd, helped me with my school home work after I arrived in her home in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Together we have shared speaking about human trafficking to countless media outlets. She has been a source of emotional support when countless other challenges have risen.

My American father, Deetz Shepherd, has been also a source of encouragement over the years. He has had a listening ear and has been non-judgmental through my ups and downs. Together we have enjoyed talking sports for years. And now he has been encouraging me by walking me through several Bible studies.

My American sisters Kyla, Christi, and Shelly have all been wonderful. They have all embraced me as their young brother. At every family gathering they have been incredibly engaged and are always asking me questions about school and how I'm doing. In addition, Kyla has been great about sharing her 4 boys with me, many times inviting me to her house to play with the kids. She has on several occasions brought the boys to visit my dorm room when I was in college. In times of difficulty she has called me to check and see how things we going.

I began school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Colleyville Middle School in 2000. My English was limited and emotionally I was home in Zambia wanting to see my family. Before school started my mom arranged a meeting with the school principal. In the meeting she explained to the principal my background and everything that had happened to me. The principal prayed for me at the end of the meeting and vowed to help me in any way I needed.

Before school started my mom took me shopping for new school clothes, a back pack, books, shoes, socks, lunch box, pencils, pens, and more. She then left town to help my sister Shelly, her youngest daughter, move into her dorm room at Baylor. So her friend Roxanne took me to school for my first day of class. From that moment on she took me to school every morning and came to pick me up afterwards. In the morning she fixed me lunch and made sure my homework was done on time. She went to all the parent meetings at school and encouraged me to participate in student activities such as joining the school choir at Colleyville Middle School.

In the evening my mom helped me with my reading and writing homework. My father helped me with my math homework. English classes were extremely tough for me given my Zambian educational background. So reading a novel and trying to extrapolate what it was saying was tough and it took me many hours doing it on my own. Writing stories on these novels was also a challenge. So my teachers told me to start writing about my experience in Zambia, or what it

was like coming on the plane from Zambia. Or what the villages looked like in Zambia. That was helpful. Eventually, however, I resented them giving me lesser work or different work just to pass my classes. I wanted to be the doing the same thing every kid was doing. I told mom not to tell my teachers about my Zambian background because I wanted them not to know me for being from Africa, but for being a student just trying to do his best to pass his classes like everyone else.

My parent's patience in me paid off. In 2001 I graduated from Colleyville Middle School and enrolled at Grapevine High School. My biological parents never went past the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, so I was happy knowing my studies would have made them proud. In high school my mom did the same thing she did in middle school, giving me a package to take to each of my teachers so they could understand my background. Again I resented doing this because I didn't want them treating me any differently from everyone else because of my background. All I wanted was not to be treated different because of my background. As a freshman I joined the school soccer team and played for 3 seasons. Most games were played in winter season and my parents came to support me regardless of the weather. My junior and senior year I joined the cross country team because my best friend Josh from middle school was also running. In addition I was trying to increase my speed for soccer so I could get more playing time. Academically, I guess like most high school students, I did as little as I could do to get by. There was no Zambian role model for me to model my life after or try to emulate in my educational endeavors. In 2005 I graduated from high school and decided to become a pre-dental student after reading a classroom brochure in high school. I decided to start taking school seriously again because I realized I was slowly becoming an adult and if I didn't work hard then I wouldn't have a future to rely on.

In August of 2003 during my sophomore year in high school I received my T Visa, a victim of human trafficking, now with permission to remain in the United States. That paper work meant that I was secure in my status as long as I followed the rules of the INS and was not committing any crimes. I was no longer in limbo and could actually begin to see my future ahead of me. An angel named Dolly Warden sat on my shoulder as I struggled waiting for this valuable visa. She encouraged me through each step of the application process and rejoiced with me when I received my T Visa.

My American family's support has been unyielding and straightforward. They have included me in every family holiday planning. In addition I have been included in every family picture portrait as if I was no different. My family in Zambia has received financial support including building a house for my brother Cephas to share with his family. My young sister, nephews, and nieces have some education because of the support my American family gives me. My brother rents part of the house they helped build for him so he could have some monthly income to support his family. My family supported my younger sister Doreen through her pregnancy by sending her to a better trained doctor in Lusaka although the baby still died.

It takes money, commitment, and lots of caring to raise a child to be a champion in life. I consider myself a champion not in an elegant way but in a thankful way to what I have accomplished given my background. Today I'm in dental school because of the support I have received from my American mom and dad. In my journey to get to dental school my family bought me my first computer in college which helped me do my homework. They moved me to my first dorm at Stephen F. Austin which was 4 hours away from Colleyville. They bought my dorm room carpet to make my room comfortable and took me shopping for all the things I could have ever needed to have a successful start to my college career. During Home Coming they

drove to Nacogdoches and gave me spending money if needed to get something to eat. When I decided to transfer from Stephen F. Austin to Tarrant County Community College after my freshman year at Stephen F. Austin they welcomed me back into their home with open arms.

I graduated from UNT in 2008 with a Biology degree and began applying for dental school. I was the first college graduate in my extended Zambian family and I know my biological mom and dad would have been so proud of me. After graduating from UNT mom helped me with my application for dental school. Applying to dental school was an incredible task that required lots of time and money gathering all the information dental schools look for in the admission process. My American family paid for me to take the dental admission exam twice because I did poorly the first time I took it. They paid for my monthly auto insurance bills, phone bills, and gas money for my automobile which they gave to me during my sophomore year in high school.

They helped me find my first apartment in Dallas. They helped set up my new apartment and bought my bed, pillows, blankets, couch, TV, washing machine, silver wear, etc. They bought a new laptop computer which was required for school.

The support I have received is immeasurable and the only way to ever repay back is by doing the same to someone else in need. Someone whom you know, if you don't do anything to help them, they may never reach their full potential in life because of the lack of resources. Finishing dental school will enable me to help my country and many other people as I have always wanted. Thanks to my entire American family (especially my mom) for their support, my dream is only 4 years away from being fully realized.

### **Finishing college**

The reason I triumph in my achievement to finish college is because it's something I never dreamed would be mine. Growing up in Zambia my goal in life was to finish twelfth grade education and find a job, get married and be happy. That all changed when I met a loving family that was willing to support me through my education years.

College taught to plan to sleep and wake up on time in order to be a successful student. It taught me to study extra hours on Friday nights in the library in order to successfully pass my classes. In addition, college taught me to push extra hard to get out of my bed when sleeping in felt like a better choice than going to that early morning class. Furthermore I learned it was okay to miss out on my favorite sporting events in order to accomplish my school related tasks. I also learned to act and behave in a professional way in my dealings with college professors and student colleagues.

Finishing college gave me the opportunity to apply to dental school and be accepted at Baylor College of Dentistry. When I finish dental school I will be able to serve the community and give back just as much has been given to me. The decision I made from a pamphlet could lead to a lifetime of happiness by being able to give back to the community and the poor populations. I've been told that many of us will have outstanding loans finishing dental school. In order for those loans to be "forgiven", you can go to work for the American government and work in what is considered less desirable places. I would love to be a prison dentist. I have done prison ministry and I think that would be a good fit for me to repay my loans.

Finishing college gave me a different perspective on life. It's made me realize life does not evolve around what I have been raised to know. It's made me realize there are many different cultures and each one is unique and each one and has good and bad. Interacting with my Asian

friends in college made me see into their culture. The same with my Indian friends, white friends, gay friends or what have you. Growing up in Zambia as a child, I remember it being common amongst my friends to make fun of other cultures or ethnicity not realizing the same could be done to us by other cultures.

Finishing college gave me hope about my future. Although my SAT scores were poor, knowing that I could still graduate from college on time and pursue another dream was incredibly uplifting for my dreams. In addition, although I didn't have the finances to go to college I knew if I studied hard enough everything would fall in place. Although I knew it was going to be hard to stay away from my Zambian family for another 4 years, I knew everything would be fine in the end. My faith in God carried me through those hard times.

College taught me about perseverance. In my first biology class in college I earned a failing grade. But instead of giving up I decided to push forward by working harder so the same thing would not happen again.

My first semester grades at Stephen F Austin were, D in Zoology, A in English, B in math, B in history, and B in communications. The next semester I signed up for a chemistry course, along with English II, Algebra I, and Music Appreciation. The chemistry class was going to be my deciding factor for pushing forward in my dental pursuit. If I received the same letter grade in this course as I did in zoology then I would have to change my major and find something that was more suited to my skills. Not wanting to divert from my dream, I promised myself to study for as long as I could and study whatever and whenever I could to make sure I passed that class. So I went to every study group session offered by the university. I attended every class, did every homework assignment, and came out of the class with an impressive C. After the semester was over, I drove home from Stephen F. Austin for 4 hrs singing praise to God for my accomplishment. Receiving a C in chemistry meant I could remain with my pursuit to dental school. Receiving a C in that chemistry class gave me a little bit of hope, and that little bit of hope was all I needed to remain motivated. On my way home from Stephen F. Austin after the semester was over, I drove home to Colleyville singing praise to my Lord. I was so excited I even got a speeding ticket. In my other classes I received a B in English 2, B in Algebra, and A in Music Appreciation. As you can see my grades were never stellar but it was my hard work that got me the grades I got and I'm glad I worked hard to achieve my goals.

After spending a year at Stephen F. Austin I transferred to Tarrant County Community College closer to home. Driving back and forth between Nacogdoches and Colleyville was becoming more and more daunting, and the weight of being alone on a college campus forced me to make the decision to return home to get additional support from my parents. I spent a year at Tarrant County Community College and took General Chemistry II, Organic Chemistry I, Biology I, and other science classes and managed an impressive 3.0 GPA. My journey to get to where I'm today has been a slow and progressive journey, but it has taught me a lot about hard work and perseverance.

In 2007 I transferred to the University of North Texas in Denton where I found my perfect college campus. The diversity of the college enabled me to learn about a lot of different ethnicities and cultures. In addition the University of North Texas in Denton was only a 45 minute drive away from home, which meant I could go home on the weekends and spend time with my family and friends in Colleyville. Academically I improved a lot as I learned new techniques to study. My best semester was fall 2007 when I had a 3.99 GPA while taking Microbiology, Organic Chemistry, Calculus, and Principles of Nutrition. It was my greatest achievement academically because it took a lot of energy and focus for me to manage such a

schedule. I graduated from the University of North Texas in 2009 with a degree in a BA in Biology and 3.2 overall GPA, not bad for a kid who didn't even know he would ever get a chance to even be in college as a child.

In June 2009, I finally received the promised permanent residence card after waiting for years. With this new status, I knew I could finally return to Zambia to see my family and come back to the US to continue my education. My American family purchased a ticket for me to go home to visit my Zambian family for the first time in 11 years for Christmas of 2009. It was one of the best moments of my life because I got to share my favorite holiday with my Zambian family. In addition I found the entire family in good health and living a relatively better life than they would be if I never came to the United States

### **Speaking about human trafficking**

Human trafficking is an atrocity that affects 27 million people around the world with an estimated 14,000-15,000 brought to the United States each year. If the general public does understand this vicious occurrence, then the problem will get much bigger and become even more of a challenge to eliminate. My journey to testifying about human trafficking began when I was in high school.

In 2003, I was invited to speak to the Committee on Jurisprudence regarding a Texas state law to punish human traffickers. I agreed to testify and my mom, dad and I drove to Austin Texas to make our contribution. While there mom and I met Kevin Bales, founder of Free the Slaves, a pioneering organization in the fight against modern day slavery. Kelvin Bales encouraged me to use my story to educate the public so we could help to eliminate modern day slavery. At the time I didn't really understand his reasoning but today I appreciate Kevin for all the work he has done to help eliminate modern day slavery from the world and for helping me understand how my story could help change the public awareness.

When I stood in front of the jurisprudence committee to tell my story, I was nervous because it was the first time I'd stood in front of an American audience without performing in choir format with which I was comfortable. I remember after I finished speaking one of the chair ladies on the committee thanking me for sharing my story and telling me how courageous I was for doing what I did. She asked me where I went to school and just acted very nicely to make me feel welcomed. After the speech a camera man approached me and was asking me further questions about my story for the local news. All I could do was explain my experience and nothing more.

Speaking to that committee opened doors that I never were possible nor sought. Since that day I have shared my story with many with conventions, churches, schools, TV programs, newspapers, magazines and various other media outlets. In part because of the work we have done, many other states in the country have adapted anti-trafficking laws.

In return I have been blessed with scholarships which have helped me go to school and further my education. My mom would do the research to find these scholarships and together we would write the community service based scholarship essays. Some of the scholarships I have been awarded include Prudential Spirit of Community National Award- awarded by Prudential Financial and National Association of Secondary Principals, National Award – awarded by Yoshiyama Hitachi Foundation, Ronald McDonald Future Achievers for Black Students –

awarded by Ronald McDonald House Charities, “20 Teens Who Will Change the World” – Teen People Magazine, Field Scovell Award – awarded by the Field Scovell Foundation and more.

Of all the speaking we have done we have never asked to be compensated for our work except for transportation or accommodation expenses. We feel led that such stories should not be told for a profit but rather free to help the public understand this atrocity. It requires many voices to help get rid of such an atrocity as human trafficking. In cases where we have been compensated we asked that that money be donated to an organization such as Free the Slaves or J.O. Chifundo, a school my mom helped open in Kalingalinga, my home community.

Furthermore, I think our work has been beneficial in helping people in Zambia understand what modern day slavery is. Few choirs have left Zambia to come to the United States under false pretenses since we started speaking because the American Embassy in Zambia has been more careful in insuring visas to choirs coming to the United States to perform. Unfortunately, this has created resentment towards me from other choirs wanting to come to the United States and former choir members who did not get to remain in the US. However, I firmly believe I have been doing the right thing. I support other culture choirs coming to sing in the US, but not under the pretense of a good cause with trafficked persons behind the scenes. I believe if I can prevent even one person from being trafficked into the United States, that person will have been prevented from having to face the many challenges that victims of human trafficking face.

I am a very blessed young man and know my journey has not been nearly as painful as hundreds of thousands of victims of this horrible crime. My family has not been threatened; I was not physically beaten, maimed or burned. I am still alive. So many victims will never realize survivorship because of the nature of their destroyed and stolen lives. They will be forever broken and scarred and this is why we must put an end to this global crisis. No one should be able to earn money for the work of another and people should be paid fairly for their work.

As David Batstone says, “I am not for sale, you are not for sale, no one should be for sale.”