Memoir of Attending a Bush School

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August 1, 2012

Florissant, Missouri

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Introduction

When I joined Bukalasa Minor Seminary in Masaka in 1984, one of the teachers called me “the boy from a bush school.” He used that term (which became my nickname for some time) because I had attended a primary school located in one of the remote villages of Uganda. When I joined the seminary for high school and priestly training, there were many new experiences. For instance, I used electricity and running water for the first time. Some people say, “You can take a man from the village, but you can’t take the village out of him.” This is true to some extent, with regard to some positive traits and also challenges associated with the village environment, which impact a person who grew up in that setting. This booklet outlines some of my experiences that I can recall when I was 2 to 13 years old in a bush school in a rural village in Uganda.

Chapter 1

Kooki

The county in which I was born and raised is called Kooki. This county is located in the Rakai district of Uganda. Kooki was a kingdom ruled by a king whose title was Kamuswaga. The first king of Kooki, Bwowe, came to Kooki from Bunyoro Kitara after a disagreement with his brother, the Omukama of Bunyoro. When Bwowe and his people came to this county, the weather was hot and dry. They said "*Kooki,*" which means 'it is hot,' so the name of the county became Kooki. At the place at which they stayed their first night when they arrived in Kooki, Bwowe told one of his people, "*Yar'akai obyame,*" which means 'lay your mat and sleep.' Because of this, the place was named Rakai, which became the kingdom's headquarters. In 1896 Kooki became part of the Buganda Kingdom but kept its autonomy with its hereditary leader Kamuswaga.

Kooki is a region of mountainous terrain. The most spectacular feature of Kooki is Kijjanebalola Lake. This lake looks like a river and has its source in Buhweju of Ankole. It meanders through Mbarara, in which it is called Lwizi, and goes on to form Lake Mburo. From there, it wanders east to form Lake Kacheera, and then becomes the River Kanagisa, which connects to Kijjanebalola Lake. This lake is known for drying up, becoming just a flat land for people to walk across. That is why it is called Kijjanebalola, which means 'people see it when it comes.' Kijjanebalola Lake has gone dry three times in history: in 1929, 1940, and 1950. People have seen water emptying and filling the lake, which is a special feature of Kijjanebalola Lake. My father is one of those who crossed the dry lake when he was going to school in 1950, like the biblical Moses and the Israelites as they crossed the Red Sea. Then, water surged and filled up to form a lake once again.

Kijjanebalola Lake is home to hippopotamuses, poisonous snakes and monkeys which live in the forests along the lake shores and in the four islands found in Kijjanebalola Lake. The four islands are Luzinga, Kinoni, Kenkoko and Kabaya. The hippos rest all day and come out at night to feed on crops and grass. There are many wild animals, poisonous snakes and various species of birds in the forests in these islands and in the area along the lake. The main types of fish found in this lake include tilapia, lungfish, cut fish, Buyamba, Nsomaki and Nkejje. Kijjanebalola Lake is a freshwater lake. For that reason, it is the main source of the water supply in the Kooki region. This lake has no sand, which makes it difficult to have a beach, because the shallow water is always dirty and muddy. Swimming along the shores of this lake is very difficult because of the mud, which is clay. Many people drown because it is difficult to extricate oneself from the mud. We were always warned not to swim in this lake because of its physical challenges.

The situation of mud in Kooki is so great, especially during the rainy season, that even walking becomes very difficult and driving is almost impossible. The village in which I was born is the most impacted by the clay mud; that is why it is called "Kyondo," the Lukooki word for mud and Ttosi in Luganda. Kyondo Village is very fertile with black soil, especially the areas along the lake. The major

crops grown are banana plantains, coffee, potatoes, cassava, beans, maize and sorghum. Many fruit trees grow naturally, such as mangos, oranges, jackfruit and avocados. Fruit gathering was an important activity for children when we were growing up.

Chapter 2

Pre-School

There was neither a kindergarten nor a day-care center in Kyondo Village when I was growing up. When I was 2 years old, my mother took me to her parents (my grandparents) to live with them. I am the fourth born, and my sister, Margaret, who follows me, had just been born. My grandfather was called Joseph Ssebowa, and my grandmother was called Teresa Namakula. Grandfather was a veteran who had fought in World War II. He was a licensed hunter, and the colonial government had given him a gun for the hunting expedition. I remember him going with some porters to hunt in the jungle. The porters would carry home his catch, and, whenever he came home from the hunting business, lots of people came to his home for wild meat. The most popular animals he hunted for meat were buffalo and antelopes. At my mother's parents' home there was always meat of wild animals. It was usually smoked, and they used salt to preserve it, since there was no refrigerator. I stayed at my grandparents' home for a year. When Mum visited her parents, she observed that they were treating me like a prince, because I was the darling of everyone, since all their children were grown and all the attention was on the grandkid. Mum did not like the soft treatment I was being accorded at the grandparents' home; she thought I would be spoiled. She took me back home to play with my sister, who was 1 year old.

Our mother did home schooling for all of us nine children before we started formal education in a school setting. Mum's method of teaching math was simple and interesting. When she was preparing a meal for the family, she would call us to count banana plantain pieces. She asked, if each one of the family members was going to eat two pieces of banana, how many pieces would we need? To figure it out, we had to portion two bananas to each family member and then count them all. Another way that Mum taught us math was that sometimes the siblings would sit in a line and she would tell us to count the toes on all the feet in the line. Using such methods, I learned to count from 1 to 50 before I started school. It was my mother's home schooling that earned me my first scholarship to school.

In 1976 I visited my other grandparents' home, the parents of my father. Grandpa's family name was Kulyennyingisikugwamaddu, which means 'overeating does not cure greed,' and Grandmother's name was Nakawungu. When they became Christians, my grandpa was baptized Alex and my grandma was named Antoinette, but people usually called her Tonita. At my grandparents' home, coffee beans were baked with some spices and were sun-dried. They were then wrapped in banana fibers in a ball shape the size of a 2-year-old baby's fist. People liked to chew those coffee beans; they helped keep one awake and were an energizer. So when I saw those coffee ball packages, I started counting them, one to twenty-five. I did not realize that Grandpa was observing with amusement my counting. When I finished, he said, "*Muzukulu, watandika ddi okusoma?"*(Grandson, when did you start school?). "I have never

started school," I answered. Grandpa came closer, patted me on the back, and asked, "Where did you learn to count like this?" I said, "At home. Mama has been teaching me." Grandpa said, "*Weebale nnyo.* (thank you very much). I have to see that next year you start school." At the time I didn't take his word seriously, but this turned out to be the beginning of a strong bond between Grandpa and me.

The following day, after our family morning prayers, when we had started breakfast, which consisted of black tea, baked sweet potato and some passion fruit juice, we saw Grandpa coming to our house. Grandpa would usually visit us on Sunday evening, when Dad was home. When Mum saw him, she asked him, "What is the problem? You can't have come this morning for a good cause!" We were all worried, since Dad was away on a business trip. We thought that maybe Dad was not ok and that Grandpa had come to inform us of this. In 1975 Dad had been arrested and incarcerated for a week by Idi Amin's soldiers for unknown reasons. As Grandpa was approaching our house, Mum asked him again from a distance, *"Taata mirembe?"* which means, 'Father, is everything alright?' Grandpa answered, "Yes." Since we were all anxious to know why he was visiting us so early in morning, he did not want to keep us in suspense. When Grandpa entered the house, he pointed at me and said, "I have brought school fees for this boy; he must start school next year." Then he turned and said to Mum, "Thank you for teaching him. Yesterday he was at my house and he counted like he has been in school already." Grandpa pulled out a dirty brownish piece of cloth from his tunic and put it on the floor (traditional custom does not allow him to hand it directly to his daughter-in-law or to shake hands with her or embrace her). My mother unwrapped the cloth to see its contents; there were many coins! She didn't count them, she just thanked Grandpa. She also told me to thank him. I reluctantly did so, because at that time I did not clearly understand the role of money in education. Grandpa didn't stay long, and he didn't take any of our breakfast before he left.

My siblings were eager to know what I had done at Grandpa's house that had earned me a scholarship. I told them how my counting the coffee beans had impressed Grandpa and how he had said that he must see that I started school next year. The thing that I was most fascinated with was how the old man had kept his word and implemented it so quickly. It was by Mama's effort, not my intelligence, that I won Grandpa's scholarship. When Dad came home on the weekend, Mum told him about Grandpa's offer and how he wanted me to start school in January. Dad seemed not to care about Grandpa's offer; he did not even ask how much money Grandpa had contributed. I think he viewed it as a usual present from a father to his son. Even I did not ask Mama the amount of money Grandpa had given me. After some years, Mama revealed to me that the money was enough to pay for my tuition for a year.

The scholarship fund that Grandpa entrusted to my mother helped her start a small business. Mum did not just keep the money, like the foolish steward mentioned in the Bible, who buried the money that the master had entrusted him with and just kept it until the master's return. My mother, being a stay-at-home mum, did not have an income-generating activity. In addition to raising her kids, she had to grow food to feed her family. Mama used some of the money that Grandpa had given her for my education to buy a piglet, which she named "*Bakazi nkwenge*." The pig grew fat and heavy. It produced eight piglets, which Mom sold. With the proceeds, she started a local beer-brewing business. We started buying the type of banana plantain called *mbidde*, which was used for beer processing. Mama started earning some money to supplement Dad's income. When one of us fell sick, especially with malaria, Mom did not have

to wait for Dad to pay for medication and treatment. Our home situation improved a lot when Mom started earning some income.

Chapter 3

Starting School

In January 1977 I started school at Kyondo Primary School. This school was established in 1956 by Rev. Father Lawrence Walakira, the parish priest (pastor) at Kasozi Parish, under whose jurisdiction was Kyondo Sub-Parish. Kasozi Parish was founded in 1894, and, in 1900, Kyondo Sub-Parish was established on 20 acres of land donated by Prince Ernest Bimanywa. Kyondo Primary School came into existence after 56 years of sub-parish establishment. According to Mr. Emmanuel Kaweesi, when Rev. Father Lawrence made a pastoral visit to Kyondo Sub-Parish, he advised the parents to start a school. The parents welcomed the idea; they worked as a group to build the school, using mainly local materials. Father Lawrence, himself, also got physically involved in the school construction project. Every week he dedicated 1 day working with Christians on the school project.

When I started at Kyondo Primary School, the school was still in a poor state. In Primary One (Grade One) and Two we were using the sub-parish chapel for a classroom. Primary One students used one end of the church facing the sanctuary area, and Primary Two students used the other end facing the main entrance. This was because there was not enough space in the classrooms. Sometimes Primary One (Grade One) lessons were conducted under a shady tree when it was not a rainy season.

In Primary One and Two we had neither desks nor chairs to sit on and write. We sat down on the floor. We were encouraged to bring mats made out of banana fibers from home to sit on. The mats helped to prevent dust from making our khaki pants dirty. The floor of the church building was not cement; it was just a dust floor, which was a safe haven for jiggers. Jiggers are tiny brownish insects before they enter a human body, mainly through the feet and fingers. Once a jigger enters a person's body, it takes a few hours to get big, it itches, and it is very irritating. When you have a jigger in your body, concentration in class is almost impossible. The best thing is to get it out as soon as possible before it starts developing and producing eggs, which hatch more jiggers that continue to eat the body.

Besides making our uniforms dirty, the dust was also very cumbersome to the eyes, especially when the winds blew. Because of the dust, we often got sick from red eyes and flu. Due to the uncomfortable situation associated with dust, we were always looking forward to being promoted to Primary Three, when we would start sitting in desks, which would overcome the problems of the dust and the jiggers.

At Kyondo Primary School the teachers were very dedicated and serious. I am very grateful for the great work the teachers performed in difficult situations. Some of these great teachers are still with us, namely Mr. Vincent Ssango and Ssalongo Geraldo Matovu. The teachers encouraged us to work hard for a better future. The teachers did not tolerate indiscipline; as a matter of fact, beating was a normal punishment for disobedience and poor academic performance.

Chapter 4

A Typical Day at Kyondo Primary School

Kyondo Primary School officially opened at 8:30 a.m. East African Standard Time. At that time, the bell went off and we all assembled in front of the school building. The Assembly was organized by prefects (team leaders), who maintained order. We lined up in teams, each team being comprised of two lines, one for girls and the other for boys. Short students were in the front, and the lines ascended according to classes, because Primary (Grade) One pupils were shorter than those in Primary Two, and so on. The teams were assigned names, sometimes representing different countries in Africa, for example, team Rwanda, Kenya, Mali, etc. The only African country that was excluded was South Africa, because at that time it was still under apartheid. Sometimes the teams were named after animals, such as Tiger, Lion, etc.

About 8:37 a.m. the teacher on duty would come to address the Assembly. When the teacher appeared, we began with prayers, sometimes in the form of a song. After prayers, the teacher inspected the Assembly, going line by line, checking hygiene, mainly clean uniforms and body sanitation. The students who were found lacking in hygiene were punished and their teams lost points. It was collective responsibility. After hygiene checkup, the teacher proceeded to investigate those who had disobeyed the order of bringing materials for school use. The items that the teachers would ask us to bring to school from home usually included firewood to cook the teachers' meals, grass for making brooms used for cleaning, and reeds and cow waste for smearing classroom floors to reduce dust and jigger bleeding. Students who failed to bring these items were severely punished, in most cases by caning them. Disobedience was a serious disciplinary matter at Kyondo Primary School. Corporal punishment was allowed, in order to enforce discipline and compliance with school regulations and academic standards.

After all the aforementioned activities, the teacher on duty dispatched the Assembly for general cleaning. This activity took about 20 minutes and was conducted in teams. The teams were assigned specific locations to clean, and the team leader (prefect) supervised members. Each team was comprised of students from different classes (grades), boys and girls. This helped to keep a team as a family and created cohesion, because young (lower-grade) students worked with older students for the success of their team. Team members cared for the well-being and success of teammates. For example, if a team member missed school, the team would be concerned because a missing member increased their work load. If you missed school for several days, team members would come to your home to check on you after school to see what was going on.

The teacher on duty inspected the assigned area, awarding points. The best team in general cleaning and other activities, like working in the school garden, received a prize at the end of the school year. We had no paid cleaners or housekeepers at school; all cleaning was done by the students. There were days when we worked in the school garden. The plants in our school garden included banana groves for plantains, corn, beans, peas, ground nuts, cassava and varieties of vegetables. The food we grew mainly helped to feed the teachers, because it was not enough for both students and teachers. Students had to go home for lunch; some who came from a long distance brought a packed lunch (*amawolu*). We also had fruits such as pineapples, papaya, oranges and mangos. Some of the fruit trees, like mangos, were planted in the school yard (compound); they provided good shade from the scorching sun, and we enjoyed the fruits. Sometimes we convened under these trees for lessons when the temperature was high and it was too hot in the classrooms. We had no electricity, much less air conditioning!

Chapter 5

Class Time

When general cleaning or gardening was finished, a bell rang and we rushed to our respective classrooms. When the teacher entered the classroom, we all stood to greet her/him. The first activity the teachers were concerned about was roll call, after which they checked homework. The teachers were very strict about homework. If a student failed to do it, the conventional punishment was for the student to get caned as many strokes as the teacher chose. We took homework seriously because we feared getting punished. As we advanced in our studies, we realized that homework was for our academic benefit; then we started doing it not to avoid punishment but for academic success.

After going through homework, the teachers then embarked on mental work. This was to test how fast a student could remember material and solve math problems. We did not have calculators, so the teacher would pose a question, like 5/2.3 x 6 =__. The teacher wanted an answer in about 3 seconds. The first student to raise a hand and provide a correct answer got points that counted toward the cumulative grade at the end of the term (semester). This worked like trivia questions or quizzes, which helped to boost the brain in the morning.

The first lesson was usually math; it was conducive to do math in the morning before the temperature got too hot. Mathematics became very challenging for most of us when done in too much heat. The math class lasted for about 45 minutes. A second class also lasted for about 45 minutes, after which we had a break.

Break time was very exciting, with many games and sports. The most popular sport for boys was soccer. We did not have manufactured rubber/leather soccer balls. We made soccer balls using banana grove trunk fibers, which we wrapped and bundled together in the round form of a ball. Some of these locally made soccer balls were heavy, especially if you wrapped banana fibers around a stone or a rock. This made the ball go faster. The girls also used banana fiber balls to play net ball and *Kyewoma.*

Kyewoma (dive sport) was a popular sport among girls. It entailed three players at a time, two players on opposite sides (East and West) about 15 feet apart and a player in their midst, with about six rocks the size of a 7-year-old child's palm. A player on the East side would throw a ball, aiming to hit the player in the middle. The player would dodge the ball by diving and jumping, to avoid getting hit. If she maneuvered and avoided the ball, she would add a rock very quickly, before the player on the West threw the ball, trying to hit her. If the player avoided being hit by the ball from the players on both sides, and if she succeeded in adding all the flat rocks, she would win. This sport required quick coordination; the player needed to be very active to circumnavigate the ball. Young girls liked the game the most. As they grew older, they shunned it, because it involved a lot of sweating. The other sport popular among girls was rope jumping. Even the ropes were made out of banana grove fibers.

During break time, some students were assigned to prepare the teachers' lunch. Others were sent to Kijjanebalola Lake to collect water for the teachers' meals. There was a roster, so we knew when and which activities to perform during break time. If it was not your turn to engage in any of the aforementioned activities, you simply went for sport. Break time took about an hour, then the bell rang and we went back to the classrooms. We had one lesson after break and then we went for lunch.

Our school did not provide lunch to students, as I stated earlier. It was a poor school, and the food we planted was just enough for our teachers. We had one day each year when we celebrated the harvest feast. That day we had lunch at school and shared produce from the school garden. It was a meal that was shared by both the teachers and the students. That was when the winning team got their prize. Other than the harvest feast, most of us ran home for an hour and a half lunch break on a daily basis. We had to run back and forth for lunch, because lunch time began at 1:00 p.m. and at exactly 2:30 p.m. we were expected in class. Most of us did not bring a packed lunch, because there was no electricity, therefore no refrigerator to preserve food. Some students who brought packed food often got sick from eating cold, overdue meals. The lunch sprint trained students to become long-distance runners. We competed, running to-and-fro, which helped us to be on time, also. After lunch we usually had two lessons and used the rest of the time for extracurricular activities.

Chapter 6

Friday

Friday was the day with the most interesting schedule. It was the day when we had Mass at school on days when the priest was able to be there once in a while. On Fridays when a priest could not be there, which was most of the time, we had a church service conducted by a catechist. Catechism in preparation for sacraments was done on Friday. In most cases we also had one lesson on Friday. After that single lesson we were involved in manual labor. Sometimes we went to the swamp to cut papyruses along the bank of Kijjanebalola Lake.

Cutting papyruses was labor intensive. We used them as material for crafting various items. Retrieving papyruses from the swamp was a risky undertaking. Apart from the teachers, I don't remember any student who put on shoes in my school. The swamps were waterlogged, safe havens for

mosquitos and home to all kinds of poisonous snakes. Hippopotamuses came from the lake to graze in swamps, mainly at night. A papyrus itself is very dangerous when you mishandle it, because it can cause a big, open wound. Teachers carefully supervised this exercise, and young and sickly students were not allowed to go to the swamp. We normally walked in a line headed by two teachers, with some teachers in the middle, and some at the end of the line. After cutting the papyruses, we carried them on our heads to school, a distance of about 1 mile. After processing them and sun drying them, along with turf tree skin called *Binsambwe* in the local language, the teachers taught us how to make mats, baskets and art crafts. The items we crafted from papyruses were used at school, and others were sold during the school speak/open day to parents. Proceeds from these sales helped with the school's needs. This exercise helped us to acquire some practical skills. Some students who were talented in this field used the skills to make commodities that generated income after school, but I was not good at any of them!

On some Fridays we conducted a school maintenance drive. We did not have a paid school maintenance person, so we had to do it by ourselves under the teachers' supervision, except for some major school repairs or construction. At those times, the school leadership summoned our parents to come work on the issue. On a school maintenance Friday we were involved in a number of activities. Prominent and most hated of all activities was smearing the classroom floors with cow manure to reduce dust and the prevalence of jiggers. The floors were not cemented, so cow waste mixed with ashes was the cheapest material we could find. We made a paste, which we gently rolled on the floor after pouring on water. We were told to collect the cow product on our way to school; however, once in a while what we brought was not enough, so we had to go to a farm which had more cattle to bring it and do the job.

The other school maintenance activity we were engaged in was painting the blackboard that the teacher used to conduct lessons. We had to make it very dark so that we were able to read the white written material. To accomplish that goal, we used sweet potato leaves mingled with crushed charcoal. We performed other activities on Friday, like paving paths on the compound and working in the school garden. Some Fridays we participated in community service, like fetching water for a family who had lost their loved one, transporting plantains for beer brewing for a couple preparing a marriage ceremony, and cleaning the village road.

Friday afternoon was reserved for debate (public speaking) and music. Debating created a lot of tension among us, because it was in English. Topics that I remember discussing included 'a teacher is better than a doctor,' 'water is more important than fire' and 'village life is better than urban life.' The aim was to argue one's points and convince the audience. The chairperson and secretary were much respected. The debate chairperson was free to choose whomever she wanted to debate. You had to raise your hand for the chairperson to allow you to debate. Two proposers and opposers, as we called them, then spoke first. Then the debate was open to the house. If no one was volunteering to contribute to the motion, the chairperson picked someone. Once you were chosen, you had to say something. If you were caught off guard, you sweated shamefully. First you had to state whether you supported or opposed the motion. Then you had to give your reasons for or against. If you came to the debate prepared, it was interesting to air your views. It was worse to stand in front of the audience and fail to contribute. The teachers were watching and ready to punish. The first time I contributed I was shaking. After a while you would get acclimated, committing your points to memory and talking without a paper.

After debating, we had music, dance and acting, but these were optional. Only those who were interested participated. Some students went for sport. Mr. Vincent Ssango was very active in composing songs. Most of the songs discouraged alcoholism, dishonesty and superstition. Most songs praised hard work, education, peace and unity.

We used music, dance and acting to entertain visitors at our school and the parents on speak day. Sports and games were important not only for our physical well-being, but also for promoting the school. Our school competed with other schools during the district sport competition. Owing to the size of our school, we competed but were unable to beat bigger schools on most occasions. The second factor that impacted our performance in sports was the school's financial status. We were very poor, using only banana fiber made soccer balls, yet at the district competition we were using real soccer balls, which we were not used to. All in all, Friday program was less stressful academically but very demanding regarding extracurricular activities.

Chapter 7

Weekends

Weekends in the village were fun, because everything was free and ordinary. We worked on the family farm digging, using hoes. Working as a family was very interesting. We shared stories, some of them true, others concoctions, as we worked. We baked sweet potatoes and cassava by covering them with soil and then dry grass and shrubs, which we set on fire so that they would slowly burn the soil. This method is called *kikoomi*. We did not starve as we worked. Mother did not allow us to waste time on baking; we had to work to a certain point and only ate at break time.

On Saturday we did most of our chores. We went to the forests to chop wood. This firewood was what we used for all the cooking at home, because we did not have electricity. In the forests, we usually went as a group with other children from the village. This was not an easy activity, either. Anything dangerous could happen in the jungle. Although in our village there were no man-eating wild animals like lions or tigers, there was a possibility of being bitten by snakes and stung by wild bees and other insects. Wild thorn bushes caused injuries, and some wild hostile tropical plants burned or poisoned the body on contact. Apart from those possibilities, accidents used to happen, causing injuries. Some of the accidents were related to the tools we used to chop wood. For example, an axe could miss the wood you were trying to split and land on your leg. A pang or machete could chop off your fingers. Accidents sometimes occurred, and we knew which herbs to apply for immediate first aid.

We did our laundry on Saturday. This was another time-consuming activity, because some people had to walk about 3 miles to the well to collect water and use it for laundry and other domestic needs. It was not practical to take a full body shower every day, since water was a rare commodity. The water was not pure, either, because it was contaminated. We retrieved it from an open shallow well, where it rolled down when it rained. If you drank unboiled water, you got sick. Many children, as a matter of fact, drank this contaminated water and got sick from typhoid, dysentery, cholera and other

diseases. Unfortunately, some children died. We were told to always drink only boiled water; however, sometimes children forgot when they were thirsty.

Sunday was for worship and leisure. We were not allowed to work on Sunday, apart from fetching water and doing homework. After church and lunch, soccer was the game. Some Sunday afternoons we went hunting for wild honey (*Kadoma*) and rabbits. Hunting was very interesting but, in most cases, was associated with injuries from stones and thorn bushes. We chased rabbits without shoes. The best footwear was *Lugabire,* which were sandals carved out of used car tires. Pieces were cut off a car tire and shaped to the size of the foot; two strips hung over the footpad, with one strip at the rear to hold the ankle in place. A *Lugabire* prevented sharp objects from injuring your foot. This sandal, however, was not very reliable, because the strips would easily give away during the chase; sometimes you found yourself kissing the ground, and if there was a rock you couldn't help bleeding or losing your tooth.

Harvesting bee honey was equally dangerous. Tropical bees are very unfriendly, and they guard their hives aggressively. We went to collect bee honey only after dark. You can't mess with bees in daylight. They will fight you and sting you to death. Bees attack in a group; some enter your nose, and, when you open your mouth, crying out for help, they enter it till you suffocate and die. We only went at night, with fire and dry grass or banana leaves to burn before we got honey from the hive.

Collecting honey was a bit safer than rabbit hunting. The safer honey was the one called *Kadoma*. This was a type of honey produced by small, harmless insects. They normally build in abandoned ant hills; they have a queen, like bees, but they don't sting or make noise. You just have to be observant, as they are very discrete and build a tiny outlet. To reach their abode, you have to dig down the ant hill. This type of honey harvesting was labor intensive. Digging an ant hill was not an easy task. We had to do it as a group. Some ant hills had bushes and tree roots, and you had to clear those out of the way first. Sometimes we labored and didn't get to the honey before it was dark, and in some instances you reached the queen and there was no honey! *Kadoma* nectar is very sweet and highly concentrated. If you swallow it hurriedly, it can choke you to death. Dad told us that when he was growing up a boy choked to death on *Kadoma* nectar, so we were very careful when handling it. The honey we collected was very organic. The good thing with honey is that, if you don't mix it with anything, it can last a long time. It is medicinal for many illnesses.

Chapter 8

Cost of Disobedience

Mama always cautioned us to obey, and she never ordered us more than twice.

One Sunday evening my peers picked me to go harvest honey. Mama told me to shake my mattress first, which I had put out to clear out for bugs, before going on a honey adventure. I did not listen to her, since we were in a hurry; I thought I would handle the mattress issue after the honey activity. The honey we went to collect was *Kadoma,* the type which is produced in an ant hill. It took us several hours to dig

down the ant hill to get nectar. By the time we got honey, it was already dark and we were utterly worn out.

When I reached home, I just picked up my old mattress and laid it on the bed. I took a quick shower, and dinner was ready. By the time I went to bed, I was dead tired and slept soundly like a baby. Because I did not listen to my mother when she told me to shake my mattress before it got cold, I did not realize that a stranger had entered the mattress. Fatigue from the laborious honey search, honey drinking and a good dinner made me sleep like a log, and the visitor that had entered my mattress coiled around my right leg and enjoyed the warmth uninterrupted.

I had to get up early the next morning to prepare for school. When I pulled my leg up, I scared the snake, which was still enjoying the warmth around my leg, and it bit me at the ankle! I felt a cut as if from a sharp razor. I ran outside to look, and black blood was oozing out. I knew it was a poisonous bite! We were taught first aid methods that, as soon as you realize that you have a venomous bite, you should quickly tie the extremity tightly, to block the poison from entering the heart and liver. That is what I did. I used banana fibers and tied them around my leg from the point of the bite up to the knee. I went back into the house and called Mom, since Dad had already left for work. I told her that I had been bitten by a snake. The whole family got up to see what was happening. Mom brought a black stone and placed it at the spot of the bite, and it stuck tightly. When a black stone holds, then you know it is a poisonous bite. A black stone, or snake stone, is made from animal bones and is used in Africa as a treatment for snake bites. A black stone helps to suck the poison from the body. When it is full, it loses its grip. You put it in boiled milk to flush out the poison it has sucked and then put it back on the body to suck out more poison. This is what my mother did. However, some poison had already gone up my leg, and, in about 15 minutes, the situation took a turn for the worse! My eyes became red, and I felt my throat become very dry. My brother Gerald gave me green tobacco leaves to chew so that I would vomit some of the poison. The rest of the family members went to collect more black stones from the neighbors. In about 45 minutes the neighbors came and the house was full. More black stones were administered; neighbors brought other local herbs, and my situation improved.

My brother threw the mattress out and a black snake dashed out. My brother killed it at once. It was a sigh of relief for me to see my tormentor being killed before it killed me. I spent the whole week at home without attending school, because I could not walk. My schoolmates found out what had happened to me, and most of them came to see me. Even the head teacher and my class teacher, the late Mary Nambaziira, visited me. They all consoled me. Deep down I was feeling guilty that I was paying a price for disobedience. I thought that if I had listened to my mother, I wouldn't have had to go through this situation. On the other hand, I thanked God for sparing my life. If that snake had bitten me in the middle of the night, I would have died quietly in the bed. When I fully recovered, my mother said to me, "You see, you were going to die because of disobedience. I told you to put your mattress in the house before you left for honey collection, but you would not listen to me." I said, "Mother, forgive me; I will never disobey your word again." Mother hugged me and assured me that I would be fine. From that incident on, I never disobeyed my mother again. A snake, being coldblooded, when the temperature drops, looks for a warm environment, which is why it took refuge in my old mattress, which was warmer than the grass. The cost of disobedience was so high that I hated *Kadoma.* When I returned to school, I was told not to play soccer for about a month, because my leg was still weak. Snake phobia stuck with

me even after I recovered. I could not sleep well, had nightmares and never used the bed and mattress again on which I had been bitten by a snake bite.

Chapter 9

Christmas Break

When I returned to school after the snake bite, the third term (semester) was about to close. This was the last term for the academic year before we left school for Christmas break. I did not perform well academically that term, because the snake incident had traumatized me. Christmas holiday lasted 2 months and was loaded with adventures. There was no worry about school homework. We worked on the family farm, taking care of coffee, bananas and seasonal crops such as beans. The daily chores included cooking; each one of us had to cook. The evening was usually free to mingle with neighbors and acquaintances for different sports and adventures.

At night we sat around a fireplace at home and shared stories. We did not have a television. To pass time, we had to share stories and sing. We had a radio, but usually Dad and the old men used it to listen to news as they drank local beer. We said evening and morning prayers together. We shared meals together, with the food being put in the middle, with us sitting on the floor around it.

This was during the regime of Idi Amin Dada. Domestic supplies (goods) such as sugar, salt and groceries were limited, because the international community had imposed a trade embargo on Uganda due to Amin's dictatorship. We resorted to crushing sugar canes, squeezing juice out of them, which we used to sweeten tea. We barely had soap for laundry and bathing. We used papaya leaves. Uganda's coffee, which was the major cash crop, was not allowed on the international market. Family income was reduced drastically. Health care was in crisis; there was no medicine in hospitals, and we took bitter herbs like *Mululuza* and aloe vera for treating malaria. Many children died from various illnesses, especially malaria, from drinking contaminated water.

The most popular day was Christmas. We prepared for this day spiritually and socially. The priests came to the village chapel and conducted penitential services; Catholics received the Sacrament of Reconciliation to prepare for the Christmas celebration. We cleaned the house and compound, and some people bought new outfits. Animals were slaughtered on Christmas Eve in anticipation of a good meal on Christmas. We attended Midnight Mass, which lasted about 2 hours. On Christmas, when the priest came to celebrate Mass at the village sub-parish, I served as an altar boy. That was when my dream of becoming a priest took root. When I got home I pretended to be a priest celebrating Mass. I used a big banana leaf as a chasuble, and my siblings and neighbors formed the congregation.

After the Christmas meal, we had soccer competition between the villages. The winning team took a bull as a prize. After soccer, there was a village party. The party was comprised of beer, drumming and dancing. The party enhanced village cohesion and unity. Families contributed materials and cash for preparation for the Christmas party.

Chapter 10

Confirmation

I was 13 years old after Christmas, when I started catechetical instructions for Confirmation. We were a big group from the village. We walked 6 miles a day, 5 days a week, for 3 weeks to Kasozi Parish, preparing for Confirmation. The journey was fun, especially on the way home. December is normally a fruit season, so we enjoyed the abundance of fruits that grow naturally in the wild. At the church compound the priests had planted many mango trees. At the convent the nuns had an orchard with all kinds of tropical fruits. We used to help ourselves to these fruits. The nuns cautioned us that what we were doing was sin, by eating their fruits without permission. At first we didn't see it that way, since the fruit was so abundant and going to waste. We thought we were enjoying God's given produce. There were so many fruits that we didn't bother taking a packed lunch. The fruits made Confirmation classes interesting, and I don't remember missing a day. After 3 weeks of catechism we realized that, in fact, we *were* stealing from the nuns' orchard, so a Sacrament of Reconciliation was arranged before the day of Confirmation. Thank God we were absolved.

I was so excited about the day of Confirmation! Dad bought me a white shirt and my first pair of shoes, ever. Mom prepared a delicious meal with chicken, beef and plantain (*matooke*) mashed and baked well for the occasion. My favorite dish, dry fish mingled with ground nut stew, was also prepared. Since it was my day, and the first time I was putting on shoes, Dad gave me a bicycle ride to the church. Mom cautioned me not to eat mangos because mango juice could drip onto the white shirt and make an indelible yellow mark. Since I had vowed not to disobey Mom after the snake bite incident, I obliged and did not touch any fruit on Confirmation day.

We waited for about an hour, then at about 9:30 a.m. there was a commotion and children were running toward the church. The catechist sounded a drum, and we were told to assemble on the path leading to the church's main entrance, with two lines facing each other, leaving a gap of about 3 feet between the lines. Then a black car snaked in toward the priests' residence. The Bishop had arrived! The parish priest came out to welcome the Bishop and took him into the residence, perhaps for a cup of tea or water.

After about 10 minutes, the Bishop emerged and we started clapping rhythmically, as we had been instructed, to welcome the man of God. He walked between the lines we had formed, waving and shaking some hands. That was the first time I had seen the Bishop, and he shook my hand. He entered the church and we followed in lines.

The Mass started at 10:00 a.m. The choir was excellent; they performed a liturgical dance procession, and the Bishop processed in with a man guarding him ceremoniously. The man was later introduced by the parish priest as a pope knight. The Bishop's homily took about 30 minutes, and all that time my shoes were burning like crazy. I asked my friend Flugence Mugumya, "How are your shoes?" He responded, "They are fine." He asked, "How about yours?" I said, "Boy, they are killing me. I don't know what is going on!" Flugence looked down to check my shoes. He said, "You messed them up." I asked,

"What do you mean?" He said, "You put them on vice versa." I checked, and he was right. I don't remember how and when it happened, but I had put the left shoe on the right foot. They were punishing me for not being careful. I quickly changed and put them on right. I then felt very comfortable, and the Mass ended without an incident.

Chapter 11

Some Quotes That Have Inspired Me Over the Years

Everyone needs bravery and naïveté in equal measure to make an impact in this life: bravery to face certain opposition and naïveté to believe change is possible. – *Betty Long Cap*

To succeed in life you need two things: ignorance and confidence. – *Mark Twain*

Never let yesterday use up too much of today. – *Will Rogers*

Just trust yourself, and then you will know how to live. – *Johann Wolfgang*

Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth. – *Muhammad Ali*

Education is the best provision for the journey to old age. – *Aristotle*

There is no cure for birth and death, save to enjoy the interval. – *George Santayana*

A baby is God's opinion that life should go on. – *Carl Sandburg*

It is easier for a father to have children than for children to have a real father. – *Pope John Paul II*

On the whole, human beings want to be good, but not too good and not quite all the time. – *George Orwell*

Life is an adventure in forgiveness. – *Norman Cousins*

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant. – *Robert Stevenson*

A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it. – *G. K. Chesterton*

This is the first test of a gentleman: his respect for those who can be of no possible value to him. – *William Lyon Phelps*

He who has health has hope. And he who has hope has everything. – *Arabian Proverb*

Life is a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you're tired–you quit when the gorilla is tired. – *Robert Strauss*

Life consists not in holding good cards but in playing those you hold well. – *Josh Billings*

Character is much easier kept than recovered. – *Thomas Paine*

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. – *Abraham Lincoln*

Hope is a good breakfast, but it is a bad supper. – *Sir Francis Bacon*

Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up wrinkles the soul. – *Douglas MacArthur*

Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness. – *James Thurber*

Experience is a hard teacher. She gives the test first and the lessons afterwards. – *Anonymous*

No man is rich enough to buy back his past. – *Oscar Wilde*

In times like these, it helps to recall that there have always been times like these. – *Paul Harvey*

The greatest thing in life is to die young–but delay it as long as possible. – *George Bernard Shaw*

I have an irrepressible desire to live till I can be assured that the world is a little better for my having lived in it. – *Abraham Lincoln*

The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do. – *Walter Bagehot*

The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone. –*Harriet B. Stowe*

Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are stiffened. – *Billy Graham*

You are never too old to be what you might have been. – *George Elliot*

Wrinkles should only indicate where smiles have been. – *Mark Twain*

Without music, life is a journey through a desert. – *Pat Conroy*

Old minds are like horses; you must exercise them if you wish to keep them in working order. – *John Adams*

The man who insists upon seeing with perfect clearness before he decides, never decides. Accept life and you must accept regret. – *Henri Frederic*

We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are. – *Anais Nin*

No matter how dark things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see the possibilities–always see them, for they're always there. – *Norman Vincent*

In order for three people to keep a secret, two must be dead. – *Benjamin Franklin*

Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh. – *Antoine de Saint Exupéry*

The best remedy for anger is delay. – *Brigham Young*

Neither fire nor wind, birth nor death can erase our good deeds. – *Buddha*

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway. – *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared. – *Buddha*

The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing. – *Blaise Pascal*

Few men have the natural strength to honor a friend's success without envy. – *Aeschylus*

Goodness does not consist in greatness, but greatness in goodness. – *Athenaeus*

An insincere and evil friend is more to be feared than a wild beast; a wild beast may wound your body, but an evil friend will wound your mind. – *Buddha*

The best proof of love is trust. – *Dr. Joyce Brothers*

When you fish for love, bait with your heart, not your brain. – *Mark Twain*

It's sad when someone you know becomes someone you knew. – *Henry Rollins*

Friendship is like money, easier made than kept. – *Samuel Butler*

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. – *Eleanor Roosevelt*

In the field of observation, chance favors the prepared mind. – *Louis Pasteur*

The best way to make your dreams come true is to wake up. – *Paul Valery*

The man who trims himself to suit everybody will soon whittle himself away. – *Charles Schweb*

I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody. – *Bill Cosby*

A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve, not by the desire to beat others. – *Ayn Rand*

It takes less time to do a thing right, than it does to explain why you did it wrong. - *Henry Wads*

Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom. – *George Smith Patton, Jr.*

Don't find fault. Find remedy. – *Henry Ford*

The secret of getting ahead is getting started. – *Sally Berger*

You just don't luck into things as much as you'd like to think you do. You build step by step, whether it's friendships or opportunities. – *Barbara Bush*

A good solution applied with vigor now is better than a perfect solution applied ten minutes later. – *George Smith, Jr.*

It takes as much energy to wish as it does to plan. – *Eleanor Roosevelt*

It does not matter how slow you go so long as you do not stop. – *Confucius*

A man will never stand as tall as when he kneels to help a child. – *Anonymous*