**Category: Career**

**Heading: TREVOR KIBET: THE LETTER TO THE FINANCE MINISTER THAT CHANGED MY LIFE**

***We talk to Mr. Trevor Kibet, 25, on his life as a teenager at BrookHouse School, the letter he wrote to the Minister of Finance when he was 13 years old and his passion for International Relations.***

**Did you always want to specialize in International Relations?**

Not really. In high school I was good in history, economics, business studies and geography and so I thought I would end up doing something along those lines. I was also a very curious child and by the time I was 11 years old I was constantly reading the newspaper and watching the news. I however, focused on my strengths when I started to think hard about my career path and I am glad that International relations has embraced most of my interests, including current affairs.

**What opportunities steered you towards a career in international relations?**

BrookHouse School has this student programme called ‘Round Square’ which brings together young people from different countries and cultures. Through this programme, I got the opportunity to travel to South Africa in 2007 where I met other young and accomplished people from across the world. This exposure was an eye opening experience for me. South Africa had better roads and better infrastructure and I especially was curious as to why my county Kenya was not as developed.

**Is this was prompted you to write the letter to the Minister of Finance?**

I wrote the letter on my thirteenth birthday and in it I expressed my views on how Kenya can be developed and how young people can contribute to that change. I felt it was my way of contributing to my community. My parents didn’t believe it and the letter sat in their car for three weeks before they eventually sent it to treasury on my behalf. The then Minister for Finance Hon. Amos Kimunya got many such letters and I was so impressed that he read mine and decided to invite me for the annual budget reading in 2007. On the big day, I carried a small briefcase with copies of my letter and my parents dropped me off at Treasury. I then spent a few hours with the Minister discussing my letter and what inspired me to write to him.

Afterwards, we got into a motorcade and headed for Parliament Buildings. But on arrival the policeman who was manning the door barred me from entering Parliament. I guess he could not understand what I was doing in the area without my teachers or fellow students. I was so disappointed and was in tears as they led me back to Treasury Building. I eventually followed the proceedings from a television set. I was nevertheless, elated when the Minister called out my name as he was reading his budget speech and later that day I went back to Parliament where I got a warm reception from Former President Mwai Kibaki, Former Vice President Moody Awori and other dignitaries. It was a proud moment.

**What did you take from this experience?**

I came to understand the power of small gains. Something that may seem simple can have an incredible effect. The experience elicited both positive and negative feedback. I was only 13 years old but I was already in the spotlight. There were negative commentaries in the media questioning why and how I got the opportunity. Others claimed that I was able to go that far because I was related to powerful person. Which was not true. Even in school I faced peers who criticised me. I was nevertheless grateful to my parents and siblings who supported me through it all and made me focus on school instead.

The positives however, eventually drowned the negatives. In 2010, the Africa Leadership Academy in South Africa, heard about me and offered me a partial scholarship to study their Pre-University Programme. The Africa Leadership Academy trains young leaders from across Africa to be the next generation of African leaders. I was now 16 years old and I felt it was a good opportunity to learn more about my world. The two years I spent in the programme were both exciting and challenging because for the first time, I was without my family for an extended period of time. There was also the challenge of fitting in especially since I was meeting other African teenagers who were really accomplished socially and academically. For a young person that kind of exposure can have an impact on your self-esteem.

**What did you do after you finished your Pre-University Programme?**

I came back to Kenya when I was 18 and immediately enrolled for French Classes. I also took up freelance journalism and used to write for Kass FM on global perspectives. In 2013, at 19 years old, I decided to pursue a degree in International Relations in France. My initial days in France equally brought their fair share of grief. I was all alone yet again and I had to learn and live a different culture. As a teenager, I was also in the process of figuring out my identity, I had self-esteem issues, there was peer pressure and the burden of expectations from family, siblings and friends was overwhelming. Needless to say, my grades suffered in the first six months of college. I knew however, that I was destined for great things despite these setbacks and so after successfully finishing my degree programme, I joined Oxford University in the UK in 2017, to pursue my Masters in African studies.

**Many young people choose to stay abroad once they finish their studies, why did you decide to come back to Kenya?**

After you have stayed abroad for a while you realize that home is always best regardless of what you read or hear. I came back home in 2018 and I am glad that I have opportunity to do what I love. I want to build my country and continent in the areas of mediation and conflict resolution. I am currently with the European Institute of Peace which is an affiliate of the European Union. We conduct research and develop policies that can boost peace and mitigate conflicts around the world. I travel around the world and I also organize conferences with leading policy makers on the things that matter to our continent.

**What does the future hold for you?**

Education drives innovation and I am in partnership with some friends to develop a portal through which we can link young people to scholarships and opportunities both locally and abroad. The app will therefore offer a platform where young people can get holistic information and guidance on how best to navigate the available graduate and post graduate programmes. I am also keen on mentoring young people and I am involved in various youth groups, including in my church at CITAM, Karen.

**What advice do you have for teenagers?**

Our culture is designed in a way that you do not want to look incompetent or vulnerable and so many people are putting on masks. I would like to tell teenagers that it is ok to fail sometimes. They should embrace a growth mind-set and seek to build themselves progressively. For example, if you score a grace C this term, next year you purpose to move to C+ and eventually move to grade A. It must be a gradual and determined process.

The challenges I went through as a teenager have moulded into the person I am today and there are many other examples of people that rose above their failures. For example, Mitchell Obama in her book ‘Becoming’ says she had to take her bar exams severally before she could become a lawyer. Former US President Barrack Obama says he struggled with living without his father and with his addiction to drinking and cigarettes. Yet, today, we celebrate each of them for the leaders they are.