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● **Growing up in dairy country**

I partly grew up in dairy country on the slopes of the Aberdare ranges. If you have not been there, it is cold. It does not snow but it is cold, which is no excuse for not milking in time for the tractor that collects the milk anytime between 3.30 and 5am.

The trick was to call the cows with the sound of aluminium pails (what happened to them, I see only plastic buckets!). One cow with the beautiful name, Sophia was a real challenge. She wouldn't come unless she is escorted all the way from a corner of the farm. Then the milking starts and has to be complete, filled into cans and at the sound of the oncoming tractor, delivered to the road side for a pick up to be taken to Nyahururu Cooperative Creameries.

The consequence of lateness was being stuck with 50 or so litres of milk to be drunk before 3pm when the afternoon milking came round. Contrary to what you may think, this was almost a punishment as there was no one to give the milk; there was no cooling system and everyone has their own cows and milk.

● **Growing up in coffee country**

When I was not on the slopes of the Aberdares, I was on the slopes of Mt Kenya. This was coffee country and wake up time was 6am during the picking season. The instruction from the old man was to shake the bush to get rid of the dew on it. Then get cracking to pick the best berries without breaking any of the branches to ensure a future harvest. Breakfast would happen after 2 hours of coffee picking and the work would continue until evening when the berries would be bagged, taken to the factory and watched until weighing and recording. I remember going home after midnight many times. It was all worthwhile as it paid the fees.

● **In Bishop Gatimu Ngandu Girls High School.**

Somehow I found my way into the land of Sister Zonta, the famous headmistress of the old plain Ngandu Girls High School which later became Bishop Gatimu. There were over 400 girls and I knew all of them, some all their three names, this especially when I was in Form 2. Many of you identify with this talent to remember names of people but not Maths formulae, English tenses, etc. I still recall the fearful sound of Sister Zontas keys as she moved about the dorms in the dark of night looking for girls trying to read with torches inside their beds. Memories of Sister Lucille (nicknamed Kibuba due to her excessive weight) are also fresh. These good souls managed to work with me to deliver Division 1 of 14 points, ready to go to High School.

● **Kaaga Girls High School, Meru**

My life is entwined with Mountain slopes and here I was on the fertile and rainiest slopes of Mt Kenya. It felt far from home with colleagues also from Western, Nyanza, and North Eastern. Yes we had Borans, Samburus and others and together we tackled Chemistry, Biology and Geography. Highlights were

operating on rats, frogs and the like. My favourite was General Paper which enabled me to navigate any subject and write a paper in whatever direction I wanted. I passed highly in this particular paper. I was now ready for Kabete Campus.

### ☉ **Meeting the champions**

I discovered that BSc Agriculture is a worthy exploration of Science. What with Maths, physics, zoology, botany, biochemistry, chemistry, plant science, animal science, economics, sociology, entomology etc. Starting at Chiromo in 1<sup>st</sup> year and ending up at Kabete Campus is something to remember. What with having lectures at Chiromo and eating lunch in the Box (you probably need google.co.ke to find out what the box was at the University of Nairobi). I have fond memories of accomplished Professors such as David Ngugi, S. Keya, J. Mbuvi, D. Mukunya and many others. It was not always smooth though. In first year, Maths was a challenge until I decided that I had come too far to be let down by such a subject. I dug in and decided that no equation, differentiation or otherwise was going to defeat me. It paid off and of I went to 2<sup>nd</sup> year only to find new challenges of a different kind. To the untrained eye, agriculture sounds like planting crops and they grow anyway as long as you give them water and manure. Not so, we were challenged with the physiology of plants and animals, economics, genetics, breeding, etc. After wading through all this, I was pleasantly awarded a First Class Honors alongside my good but late friend Dr. Charles Omwega. Fine man he was, he died before his time.

### ☉ **Tackling a Master of Science**

To my surprise, after just one year of graduating, I was willing to study for a Masters after having declared vehemently that it was not for me. Another complication was that I was now married and expecting a baby. Challenges with details of plant disease, statistics, plant breeding and the like were now to be overcome. I weathered the storm and graduated with a Masters in Plant Pathology as well as the ability to do research on my own! I was ready for a PhD.

### ☉ **A Test of resilience**

No matter what you hear, PhD is not a real test of intelligence but resilience! My Canadian Professor John Joseph McDermott informed me that something was likely to happen to my hair by the time I was done! Being a lady, at least I was free from male pattern baldness but not grey hair. I finally wrote a 300 page thesis on the subject of pesticides. At last, school was OVER!

### ☉ **The Early Years of work**

I had the enviable experience of working with farmers in an advisory laboratory where they brought leaves, shoots, branches, roots and any plant part for diagnosis. I learnt how to distinguish fungi, bacteria and viruses as causes of plant disease. Later I worked as an inspector of pesticide businesses checking on the safety of pesticide sellers and buyers. I also trained farmers, extension officers and many others on the safety in the handling of pesticides

## ☉ Minding my Own Business

An idea whose time has come cannot be stopped. The best way to explain my transition into consultancy is to quote Jeremiah 29:11- **For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"**. Being a young Christian, I did not know that God was shaping my life at the time. I nevertheless entered my destiny rather doubtfully when I found that consultancy was becoming more natural to me than working on a monthly paid job. I set up the Pesticides and Agricultural Resource Centre in 1999 and have been at it ever since.

At PARC, as we fondly call it, we carry out consultations in Agriculture, Pesticides, Food safety and other areas surrounding these subjects.

Some of the clients we have worked with are the USAID, EU funded projects, International Food Policy Research Institute, multinational companies as well many Kenyan companies. Consultations include training, needs analysis, surveys, feasibility studies and others.

Some of the jobs we have done in the recent past:

- A consultation to carry out a Comprehensive Review of the Current Status of the Development, Regulation and Use of Bio-pesticides in Kenya. With Bio-Innovate, ILRI. Kenya.
- Completed a pesticide formulation feasibility study for East Africa, Ethiopia and South Sudan. On behalf of Bell Industries Ltd, a Kenyan company.
- Contract with IFPRI to carry out Next Harvest II, a project to assess the Status of Biotechnology in Kenya as part of a wider project to assess the status of Biotechnology in Africa.
- Awarded the tender on the program to support the EU funded EDES Programme Implementation Unit in preparing and implementing a Sectorial Self-Assessment Guide for the passion fruit sector in Kenya.
- Contract with IFPRI to assess the impact of the Biosafety Protocol on the importation of potential GMOs as well as to assess the capacity of Kenya to test GMOs in LMO-FFPs especially maize, canola, soya bean and cotton seed.



**You Can Make It! I would still study Agriculture if I went back to first year!**

