



Zimbabwe

## Letter to a young african who wants to be a journalist

Harare, 1 December 2005

My young friend,

When I was growing up, I had many dreams of what I wanted to be in life after completion of my studies. At that time - between 1980 and 1990 - the time that I was in my primary and secondary school, it was quite common among children of my age to think like that.

But making those dreams come true was not important at that time. What was important was to keep thinking of what the future held for me in as far as my dreams were concerned.

I dreamt of being a lawyer in a large office and having multitudes of paralegals and partners. My dreams always extended to journalism and football where I saw myself as the next Mike Munyati (late television journalist on the *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation*) and Michel Platini, the former mercurial French footballer.

But God decided to give me the art of writing and comprehending issues around me and endowed me with the skill of gathering and writing news. Today, I am a journalist whose road to the newsroom can be traced to the arduous journey that I have travelled - both as a young man and a mature scribe whose aspirations in life have been partly derailed because of political instability and repression. I will come back to that part.

I am glad to say that God had for long seen something in me and I also had a premonition of what was likely to come, but dismissed becoming a journalist when the time I thought I would be in the newsroom lapsed.

I started my journey into journalism on a bad note because the influential man in my life, my father died, and for sometime it was difficult to sojourn in a no man's land without his words of wisdom. But I persevered and wrote my first article in the now defunct *Zimbabwe Football*, a monthly football magazine edited by a journalist, Jethro Goko, the man whom I owe everything I have achieved in journalism.

I tried to break into mainstream journalism but doors were shut at me and words sworn ! I did not give up !

Jethro Goko decided to pay for my enrolment at a Journalism College, The Christian College of Southern Africa (CCOSA) and with that the road to a new life had been opened. I had the hunger to succeed and the passion to reach what I dreamt of when I was growing up. After two years of massive learning (1996 and 1997) I graduated and got my first job at the *Zimbabwe Mirror* in December 1997.

I later moved to *The Daily News* where new horizons were opened. At the time of *The Daily News* banishment, I was The Arts Editor for both *The Daily News* and *The Daily News On Sunday*.

Today I gladly declare that journalism has made me feel an important part in the development of my society and country although the political situation has remained bad. As a senior journalist, I have seen evil, good and met the worst of people whose hatred for anything good, has spurred me on in this profession where journalists learn new things everyday.

As a journalist I have walked through paths I never thought one day I would walk. Being central to a political discourse and heavily involved in the debate for a new direction in societal and political dispensation, through writing, has been the highlight of my career.

Limbs have been broken, lives lost, people harrassed, tortured and myself and colleagues heavily assaulted because of the desire of wanting to let the world know of our situation. But to any journalist, these are the hallmarks of true journalism where bravado and consistency separate men from boys. A night in a Police cell or any assault on me; whether physical or emotional, no longer trouble me - I have been in it and grown in faith professionally.

Journalism has brought me awards and respect in my country because of the way I have exhibited those journalistic skills. I believe a harsh environment breeds a different crop of journalism and in our case, this has been true.

Everyone who worked on *The Daily News* has earned his or her stripes. No day passes without comments on the professionalism that accompanied our reporting at *The Daily News*. And the founding editor of the paper, Geoffrey Nyarota, will always be on the lips of many Zimbabweans who witnessed his courage in face of adversity. He twice escaped assassination attempts but continued as if his life was not in danger and everyone in the newsroom was galvanised by his courage.

This is why I say journalism has steeled me, built me and modelled me along the lines of a true soldier, a soldier responsible for information. While I acknowledge that there is still media repression and press freedom is a pipe dream in Zimbabwe, I believe the darkest hour is before dawn.

*The Daily News* will some day bounce back and would continue with our unparalleled journalism.

A word of advice though for those wanting to become journalists, the profession is not for the FAINT-HEARTED. The faint-hearted in journalism do not last long. Some of us have gotten used to strong arm and knee-jerk tactics. But these have failed to disillusion us forever.

As I earlier mentioned, my journalism has been derailed temporarily because of the banishment of *The Daily News* and its sister paper, *The Daily News On Sunday*.

The two titles were shutdown by the government and security agents on September 12 2003 for having not complied with the provisions of the draconian Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) which demands registration of media houses and journalists. Although we later complied with the law (AIPPA) the papers have remained banned despite a Supreme Court ruling directing the Media and Information Commission (MIC) to reconsider our licence application. And all our production and newsroom equipment is still confiscated by the security agents and kept at a maximum prison - Chikurubi Maximum Prison. The matter between *The Daily News* and the MIC is before the Administrative Court and the High Court.

But all this has not dampened my spirits. I strongly believe we will soon be publishing.

Friendly yours,

**Guthrie Munyuki**  
Arts Editor, *The Daily News*