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Hope is a Beautiful Thing

Hope that feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best is what causes countless generations of immigrants to cross unforgiving desert, vexing oceans and dangerous pathways to immigrate here in pursuit of the American dream. It is the story of a little known community organizer Barrack Obama, whom against all odds, became the first black president of the United States; that of a colony with untrained militia fighting for freedom from then the most powerful empire in the world; that of ex-president Mandela who led the fight for south Africa to be freed from apartheid regime and in the process became jailed for 27 years, but yet he retained hope that one day, not only would he be free, but the whole of south Africa. Hope is the stuff of champions and winners-but also of losers, albeit losers, just like the vanquished, sadly never get equal space to tell their stories.

Anyone can have hope regardless of their life's circumstances. A story is told of a man whose shop had been burned in the great Chicago fire of 1871. He arrived at the scene of the ruin the next morning carrying a table. He laid the table in the center of the burnt debris, and above it placed the sign, "Everything lost except wife, children, and hope. Business will be resumed as usual tomorrow morning." One of the morals behind this emotional story is that hope, as a virtue is a personal choice and requires courage even when life's situation seemed daunting.

For hope to lead to a good place one must adopt a positive mental attitude. It is often said that we generally get what we expect in life. If you believe in your heart that you will succeed in your endeavor and work towards it, you are more likely to succeed than if you believe the opposite. The great Norman Cousins often caution that despair is self fulfilling and

those who fear the worse tend to invite it.” Positive mental attitude is key to being hopeful.

Now some may confuse hope with blind optimism; that you just sit on your behind and wish that things would get better. Wrong. Hope is active; it requires doing, effort. Just as the scripture admonishes, faith without work is dead; likewise, hope without work is dead and to no avail. A student simply can't hope for good grades without putting the necessary hard work, such as extra study time, doing assignment and attending classes, all of which is required for success.

As illustrated above, the undergirding of hope are courage, positive attitude and hard work, and is the totality of these values that have anchored my hope. Hope has always been my northern star, on whose nautical I have been navigated 30000 miles from a remote village in Ghana West Africa to the United States. The story of my life and my coming to America is as improbable as the biblical rich man passing through the eyes of a camel-although in my case I was poor -dirt poor. In poverty my mother conceived me. My mother was three months pregnant when my father passed on. Because ours and the society in which I grew up was one where men are the soul bread winners and wives had to stay at home, my mother could not afford and therefore lacked the basic nutritional foods that were required for a healthy mother- baby growth during gestation. I was born premature and a low weight baby, 3 pounds shy of the average baby weight. Even until today I am yet to catch up with my peers physically.

Besides my family limitations, there were institutional ones; the education of the girl child. In the society in which I grew up it is a widely held belief-in fact cultural- that educating the girl child is a complete waste of money and time, since the girl would one day marry and change her family name. So I couldn't go to school like regular kids do. My early education was at the mercy of a next door neighbor's son. He was my play mate and teacher. Each day after school, perhaps out of a childlike curiosity, I would inquire of him what he did at school. We would

recite the alphabets together, and when his parents would teach him at home, I would sneak in to learn with him. That was how I learn to speak English- and later write it. And so the whole of my elementary education was done at home under the auspices of a kind neighbor. Eventually, my plight attracted the attention of a church mission interested in Women and child literacy. I was enrolled in junior high school. I would go school in the day trekking a distance of about 2km. only to return back home to help my mother on the farm. After farm work I would sell fresh farm produce by the roadside to motorist and passersby. But in all of these I never lost sight of my dream to be a journalist. Back from hawking stuff on the street, I would stay late in to the night doing assignments, home work and studying. My mother would often whisper in my ears in our native Hausa tongue, "my daughter, the price of success is paid in the currency of hard work."

Yes hard work did pay off. I graduated high school at the top of my class. I got a job at age 18 as a TV announcer at a television station, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, a Government owned television station. This was the job of my dreams. This opening came from an announcement that was made on radio about the station giving free tours to the public. I did not hesitate for a minute in going for the tour since it had always been my life-long dream to be a TV personality. At the premises, after the tour, I was chatting with friends, when a man whom later on, I came to know as one of the producers approached me and asked "Are you here for the audition for the position of TV announcer?" I laughed and said "no not at all." The next words that came out of his mouth were "You have to be part of this audition."

I wasn't prepared for the audition since I was at the station for sight-seeing. But my friends advised that I took the plunge, quipping that a good opportunity comes once in a life time. So I mustered inner courage and took part in the audition with 8 other people who were there specifically for that purpose; they were all dressed -up and ready. The audition was an open

one so I learned from the mistakes of those that presented before me. We read scripts before a panel and in front of a live camera. The audition lasted for about two hours, thirty minutes and at the end I was told I got the job and to get ready for a four week intensive training. To my excitement, I became an announcer on a National TV Station when I had only Junior Secondary education. A junior secondary education is the equivalent of a high school education by US standards.

I faced lots of challenges at the Station due to my limited education. However, I worked very hard and maintained a positive mental attitude. It was as if the more I excelled the more responsibilities were assigned to me. I hosted an hour long entertainment program also because I speak five of our local language and write two. In a year, I was also selected to train to be a news reader. This proved to be a very tough challenge, but this again motivated me to come to the United States to acquire advanced knowledge and be better equipped for the journey ahead. After my journalism education here in the United States, my goal is to return to Ghana to lead a cultural revolution, through mass media, especially as it relates to the education of the girl. I believe Journalists are conduits for the continuing exchange of ideas which are paramount to a new democracy such as Ghana West-Africa.

I remain hopeful that with hard work, courage and a positive mental attitude, I will be able to complete my education and make meaningful contribution to my society.

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