

## **Simba Marekera**

The first of three children, I was born and raised in Harare, Zimbabwe. Most of my early childhood was spent with my family of five and our meager possessions, packed into a small room on the outskirts of Harare. Our parents could not afford to rent more than one room, even in one of the worst neighborhoods, and we barely afforded the basic essentials.

My mother dropped out of school in sixth grade and my father finished high school by correspondence in his late 20s. My parents didn't have a decent education but were determined to provide me and my siblings with the best they could. My parents ran a small grocery shop and became relatively successful business owners in our neighborhood. By the time I was a teenager, they could afford to send us to good schools and we lead relatively comfortable lives.

For a while things were good, until my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in early 2000. My father used all our savings on my mother's treatment but the cancer had already spread and she died in August that year.

I was scheduled to write my Ordinary Level (10th grade) national exams less than two months after my mother's death. Through the support of my father and other family members, I managed to write the 10 exams and passed with nine As and a B. However, with all his savings gone and the economy in recession, my father could not afford to send me back to school for my Advanced Level (11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Grade).

Determined to go to school, I applied for scholarships to all the major businesses I could think of. I wrote letters and followed up with phone calls until a CEO of local bank agreed to hear my story. After meeting, he agreed fund the rest of my high school.

Towards the end of high school, I was looking for apprentice opportunities because I knew that my father couldn't afford to send me to university. Through my high school, I was given the opportunity to apply to a program run by the US Embassy Public Affairs Section called United States Student Achievers Program (USAP). USAP gives financial support and guidance to people applying for scholarships at US colleges. Through USAP, I applied to Yale College and I got in on a full scholarship. It was more than I had dreamed of - an internationally renowned education and with no financial burden to my father.

As I was preparing to go to Yale, it became apparent I was not going to afford visa and travelling expenses from an internship salary I was earning. I went back to the businessman who gave me a scholarship for my high school and asked for help with the expenses. Fortunately he agreed to fund travelling expenses and gave me money to cover any initial costs at Yale. With that, I started my college career

At Yale I majored in Electrical Engineering and had numerous opportunities to follow my passions and my dreams. I now work as an Analyst at Financial Security Assurance (FSA). Even as a student, I was able to help send my younger brother and sister to school and supplement my family income.

I am conscious that it took a series of small miracles to get me to where I am now. I am aware that if it was not for people willing to give little of themselves to help me, I wouldn't have achieved what I did. It is with this awareness that we bring the Seeds of Africa Foundation to existence. Through Seeds of Africa Foundation, we hope to provide ordinary people with a way to create extraordinary miracles in the lives of intelligent, economically disadvantaged children in Zimbabwe.

It is amazing what opportunity can do for people's lives. My story has been replicated in the lives of all the students who went through the USAP program. Their incredible stories can be found at the [usapglobal.org](http://usapglobal.org). Not only were the lives of the students changed, but also the lives of their families who did all

they could to give them a shot at a greater life. We hope that Seeds of Africa Foundation will also be able to change lives in small but remarkable ways.

### **Martin's Bio**

I grew up in abject poverty in the low income residential zone of Mutare, called Sakubva in Zimbabwe. I was very lucky to have a loving family and parents who sacrificed their minimal earnings to send me to school. My mother stayed at home to take care of the family while my father was one of the runners at the local paper mill. Although life was very difficult for my parents, they never forgot the importance of education.

I began my education at Chisamba Primary School where I participated in a penpal program with other schools in the USA. I was fortunate to be paired with a girl named Caitlin, who I became close friends with, corresponding over mail, exchanging pictures and cultural stories on the differences between the USA and Zimbabwe.

As time went by, the economic situation in Zimbabwe worsened, making it hard for my parents to support our family of five. School fees, uniforms and food were now beyond the reach of my parents' paltry income.

In Zimbabwe, we sit National Exams at the end of our senior year. During my senior year of high school, the economic environment in Zimbabwe meant my parents could not afford to pay for my examination fees. I had done very well in school and wanted to go further with my education. Caitlin and her family offered to help. I sat for the exams and obtained the highest scores in the region. Upon passing, I received a small scholarship from a local firm to go to a Catholic boarding school in another city called Nyanga. This was my first time apart from my family but was the only way I could reach my goal of pursuing a higher education.

At Marist Brothers High School I did my A Levels, focusing on the Sciences. With the Zimbabwean economic situation deteriorating further, I was driven me to look outside the country for college opportunities. As the end of high school drew near, Caitlin's family helped me look at some colleges in the

USA, while supporting me and my family while I finished studying.

After graduating at Marist Nyanga High School, I was accepted to Villanova University on a full tuition scholarship. I would not have made it to Villanova without the help of Caitlin and her family. At Villanova I was a double major in Mathematics and Economics. I graduated in 2007 and joined Goldman Sachs in New York City. Now that I am here in America, my family has moved from their ghetto community to a nice place, and my siblings now attend better schools.

I could not be where I am today without the help of Caitlin and her family, who took the leap of faith and believed in me while I was a rough diamond in the dust in Mutare. In Zimbabwe, there is a huge pit of talented young students who cannot reach their potential due to lack of funds. It is not about money or how many students we can help, but if we can rescue one child from poverty, that's one child that will go and change his/her family's life and eventually his/her community. This idea moved us to found the Seeds of Africa Foundation, a scholarship fund for promising students from poor backgrounds.