Connecting the dots...

Volume 16

15 October 2021



Philip Mataranyika
Nyaradzo Group,
Chief Executive Officer

Follow us on:

NYARADZO GROUP

www.nyaradzo.co.zw

Service • Strength • Solutions

Behind every dark cloud is a silver lining...

The future we aspire to create for ourselves is usually shaped by the environment we live in, the people we associate with, and the extent to which we are committed and determined to pursue that which we perceive in our minds and imaginations.

This is not hearsay; I can tell you with confidence, that I am a living testimony of how these theoretical underpinnings collaborated with a twist of fate, helping to shape my destiny, when I sustained an injury to my left leg whilst digging clay, for moulding farm bricks, when working for the Chikudo family in Chiduku.

In the words of the late John Lennon, following a traumatic upbringing after his parents' divorce when he was aged five, "there is nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be."

Before our hasty move from the hustle and bustle of the city in Chitungwiza to the village in Chiduku, at the beginning of 1978, my brothers and I had been exposed to different environments, personalities, cultures, systems and practices, all of which played a part in shaping our destinies.

In Chitungwiza, we were able to reunite with our mother after she had been given her marching orders by our father in the mid-1970s. That reunion came in the nick of time after we had been abandoned by our step-mother, Bertha, at House Number 2195 in Egypt, Highfield, in the late 1970s.

The year or so that we spent in Chitungwiza provided us with yet another opportunity to adjust to life in a new school, (Farai Primary School), getting to make new friends and acquaintances and learning a few techniques from assisting our mother in her hustles to fend for her family.

It was another learning curve while in Highfield and, before that, in Mutare, where my brothers, Johane, Thomas and I stayed with our step-mother, Bertha. We had to adapt to new environments, make new friends and more importantly, learn how to survive under her tyrannical charge.

At each point, we acquired new skills, built long-lasting friendships, and cemented relationships with members of the extended family, on both our maternal and paternal sides, including tagging along with other relatives whom we had never met before.

In Highfield, my brother, Johane, became a specialist making toys out of wire, and boy, did he make them good! Having realised that I was not cut out for that particular trade, I discovered that I was a salesperson in-waiting or in-training. During soccer matches at Gwanzura Stadium, the 10,000-strong seater ballpark used to provide a ready market for my oranges, which Bertha sourced for re-sale from Mazowe Valley.

If I was not at school or out selling oranges and other wares, I would be monkeying around in our neighbourhood, as most boys of my age used to do at the time. My small mischiefs were nothing out of the ordinary and would pale into insignificance when compared to the misdemeanours of my agemates who had a lot more idle time on their hands, since they didn't have to worry about going around our community with baskets full of products for resale, as I had to do.

Admittedly, there were many smart guys around us in Highfield, Sakubva and Chitungwiza, who knew their terrain quite well. We never attempted to beat them at their game having convinced ourselves that we were not even worthy to untie the straps of their shoes. Instead of competing against them, we were comfortable with being co-opted as underlings.

The year we went to live in Chiduku was another game changer in more ways than one. We arrived in Chifuri Village in the Chiduku Tribal Trust Lands in summer when the liberation struggle had caused schools in most rural areas to shut down in order to guarantee the safety of teachers, students and support staff.

Whilst those with the means were taking their children to urban areas in order for them to continue with their education, Johane, Thomas and I were going in the opposite direction, flying into the vortex of the armed struggle, becoming cheerleaders at pungwes or all-night-vigils.

With no learning taking place in rural schools, we found ourselves joining other boys and girls who had been left with lots of time on their hands, another opportunity to learn and understand the environment around us. Interacting with the comrades at pungwes would give us an important opportunity to learn about our history.

While in the village, outside the pungwes and other cultural gatherings and functions, we were pretty much the smartest guys around only because the local boys hadn't had the exposure to life in the city.

Our knowledge of current affairs used to turn our friends green with envy. Although we didn't have much to wear in our makeshift wardrobes, we were still streets ahead of our peers, a good number of whom had never been to a clothing shop.Our urban setting skills had their limits.

In Chiduku, boys of my age could make ox-yokes and till the land. They could build round huts and thatch them single-handedly. They were also good at moulding bricks made from mud or clay, drying them in the scorching sun, before stacking them into wood-fired kilns to bake at high temperatures in order to harden them, so they would be suitable for building purposes.

At first, I couldn't even dream of doing some of the things they were experts at. A few of my friends in the village had mastered the art of communicating with honeyguides (a small, dull coloured bird found in Southern Africa) to locate active bee nests in the surrounding hills, valleys and bushes, from which they would harvest the honey by traditional means, safely, without being stung. The honey would be consumed at their homesteads with the excess being sold. We had to catch up to survive and be relevant.

Entertainment was scarce! Apart from the pungwes or all-night-vigils which became the major source of entertainment in the village, there were not many events that would bring boys and girls together. Because of the war of liberation which was intensifying, gatherings for purposes other than funerals, memorial services, unveiling of tombstones, kurova guva or chenura, were uncommon.

On the occasions when these events were held in the village, we could not afford to miss the last two – kurova guva and chenura. Kurova guva refers to the integration of the spirit of the departed into the family, while chenura is a traditional rite whereby the spirit of the departed soul is said to be purified. Both functions were held a few months after the death of a loved one, where boys our age and older, would show off their skills at chopping firewood, skinning domestic animals, playing the drums and dancing all night long.

It was a different ball game for those of the fairer sex who had their audiences mesmerised with their scintillating, charismatic, yet graceful traditional dance skills and powerful voices that would wow their audiences. Those who were good at it stood out as perfect candidates for either a husband or wife and a good number of them ended up getting married and starting families very early on in their lives.

We had to adjust quickly to life in Chiduku by being able to do most of the things that boys of our age were doing after it became apparent that the skills we had acquired in urban areas were largely irrelevant in our new setting. Johane became a fisherman of note while I became good at trapping mice and hunting birds.

To while away time, elders – including women – would meet for home-brewed opaque beer or ndari in the village. My father was a regular at these gatherings; unmoved by the fact that his father, Kurauone Kurai Mazikana Mataranyika had met his death at a ndari in 1940 after he drank from a cup, laced with poison.

He also had no qualms with having his children join him in partaking of his favourite African brew and I would often accompany him. Having tried the so-called wise waters a few times myself, I didn't find it tasty or worth my while and therefore, didn't pursue this social pastime.

Being of sober habits and with a sense of finer things in life acquired during my days in the city, I fancied myself earning an income which would put me in an advantageous position to get married and be able to look after my future wife and children. There were, however, very few options to earn a living in the village, other than herding cattle, goats and sheep.

It certainly got my attention when seeing some of my age-mates being hired by villagers whom we regarded as well-to-do, by rural standards, to work their fields for a fee. Of the few families I considered worthy of my services herding their cattle, were the Chikudos.

As I built up the the courage to approach them, I thought about how the tables had turned. Back in the day in Gwangwara before my parents' marriage crumbled like a deck of cards, life was good. I was young at the time, but I still have vivid memories of the several handymen that we had working for us. We were treated like little princes, with our helpers doing everything, including tending the fields, herding cattle and household chores such as washing and cleaning the dishes.

One of our handymen was Ruwizhi who came from Mozambique, possibly displaced by the war in his country, which gained independence in 1975. Come to think of it, his name could have been Louis, adulterated to Ruwizhi because we could not pronounce it. We were taught to respect all our helpers and call them by the name Mukoma (big brother).

Mukoma Ruwizhi was particularly kind to us as young boys. During fireside chats, he would teach us basic Portuguese like counting from one up to seven i.e. uma (one), dois (two), tres (three), quarto (four), cinco (five), seis (six), set (seven). This was between 1971 and 1973.

Fast forward to 1979, and here I was, trying to steel myself before approaching the Chikudos to find work herding their cattle. But unlike Mukoma Ruwizhi who may have had limited options after fleeing from his home country, I was not far from our family village in Gwangwara (Rukweza) which had everything that one could think of as enablers for success. I also thought about the many friends and relatives whom we had left in Gwangwara.

Looking at the economic enablers, all around Gwangwara, and when one takes time to think about it, our homestead was less than five hundred meters from the Nyazura Chivhu tarred road. The small town of Nyazura is only ten kilometres away, with the mountainous city of Mutare – about eighty kilometres East. On the southern side, is the Chemplex owned Dorowa Mine, which is, about sixty kilometres away. At its peak, the mine was a hive of activity and an employer of choice.

Gwangwara was thus geographically well positioned for anyone seeking to advance themselves in life. These catalysts for economic development and growth were some distance away from Chiduku. Still, I was able to comfort myself, that all that mattered was to find something that would give me an income and then take it up from there.

As luck would have it, I was granted my wish by the Chikudos when they agreed to take me on as their herdboy.

The patriarch of the Chikudo family was Gopito Chikudo of the Shumba (Samaita) totem who, during the course of his life, married three women – got divorced twice –on each occasion, in order to marry a new wife. Gopito's first wife was Ramwe Zimbudzi of the Soko totem with whom he had two children, both of them girls (Rena and Jessie).

After his divorce from Ramwe, Gopito married Lillian Zhawu from the Matanhire village, with whom he had six children, all of them boys (Lovemore, Sign, William, Simon, Hapana and Coleus). When his marriage to Lillian collapsed, he got married to Manhokwe Zaranyika with whom he had six children, two boys (Ephraim and Antony) and four girls (Naomi, Remi, Enia and Sabina).

It was Ephraim, who would later become Pastor Ushewokunze Chikudo and his wife, for whom I worked. Ephraim's younger sister, Sabina, had two children, a girl named Rachel and a boy named Richard, both of whom were younger than me.

The Chikudos had a sizable herd of cattle. My work included herding and milking their cows. From time to time, before driving the cattle to graze on rolling land, I helped with other chores as assigned by my bosses.

A few weeks after I had started working for them, Pastor Chikudo decided that he wanted to build another house made out of farm bricks and I was to be one of the brick moulders. Joining me in this exercise was Richard Chikudo, nephew of my boss Ephraim and son of his sister Sabina.

My daily routine became that of waking up early in the morning to dig out clay and mix it with water to make the farm bricks. Richard and I would then dry the bricks in the sun for some days on flat soils before stacking them into a kiln or brick oven to bake.

And so it happened that, one morning, as Richard and I were digging the clay, he was behind me and for whatever reason, he lost his grip on his hoe, resulting in it cutting into my left leg. I fell to the ground in excruciating pain and to my shock and horror saw that the hoe had severed the tendon. My screams of pain brought seniors rushing to the scene from the nearby house. Luckily, one of the villagers, Mr Mutandawari had a car and when my father arrived at the scene and saw the severity of my injury, he hired him to ferry me to Rusape District hospital, given that none of the nearby clinics had the capacity to deal with this type of injury.

On arrival at the hospital, the nurses on duty prepared me for theatre so I could have surgery for the doctors to repair the damaged tendon, nerves and blood vessels. They had to work quickly given that when ligaments are broken, and are not repaired within set time limits, they recoil for good, never to recover again. Hours later, after this life saving operation, I was wheeled unconscious into the recovery room, and thereafter into one of the five wards at the District hospital.

I would spend a month in the 260-bed facility which acts as a referral hospital for nearly 60 clinics in the Makoni district. Because it was the first time I had been admitted into a hospital, everything around me looked intimidating and this was not helped by my being homesick. However as my condition improved, I became a familiar face, attaining the status of a rock star.

At the time, the hospital had specially designated wards in which patients could choose to have European-type meals, if they could afford them or the normal traditional African diet, which applied to those of little or no means. It also had specially designated wards where patients could have more privacy than is possible in a busy general ward.

I would later get to know that Rusape hospital had started off as a small facility, being a dispensary, but as settlements in and around Rusape expanded, calls for its development grew louder and louder, by the mid-1920s, authority to build the hospital would be granted in early 1927.

The European section, named Rusape Memorial, was built and maintained by the local board with the assistance of a government grant-in-aid. The rest of the funds which were used to build the hospital were derived from local subscriptions and paying patients. The Rusape Native hospital wards were constructed in 1928 and maintained by funds granted by the Trustees of the Native Reserves Trust and government grants-in-aid.

As cases of venereal diseases increased within the native population, a decision was made to build a clinic for social illnesses. Upon realising there was inadequate accommodation for sick children at the hospital, the Ken Davey Paediatrics ward would be built and officially opened a few years later. Today, Rusape Hospital caters for over 325,000 villagers and urbanites in the town and its hinterland.

I am always mindful of the fact that, it was at this facility, that my left leg was saved from potential permanent disability, which may have required that I walk with the aid of crutches for the rest of my life. Although I still feel a lot of pain walking, and I walk with a small misstep 40 years on, I am grateful that I was transported to the hospital in time and that the medical personel who attended to me did their work very well. Were it not for this injury, which when I look back at with the advantage of hindsight, I see as part of my destiny, without which I may have continued to live in Chiduku working for the Chikudos herding their cattle.

My days in Chiduku were over, when on discharge from the hospital, my heroine, my mother, came to pick me up, re-taking me into her custody and back to Harare.