

Personal Success Story/Scholarship Appreciation

My name is Vincent Erick Owino. I come from a remote village in the Western part of Kenya. I graduated from high school in 1997 but only managed to join university three years later due to lack of funds. I finally secured a place at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa-Kenya, after a long struggle trying to solicit financial help single-handedly from friends and well wishers. I am the first born in a very humble single parent family of six children.

I learned of the Wildize Foundation scholarship through a friend and a classmate from the Northern part of Kenya in January 2002. We had just finished our first year at the university and it seemed highly likely that the end of the road for my higher education was beckoning. I had narrated to my friend about my delicate financial situation and even revealed to him my plans of withdrawing from my studies altogether. He was so sympathetic and understanding. He then advised me to contact Wildize Foundation for assistance. I later sent an email to the Foundation asking for scholarship application forms. I was surprised when Madam Eli Weiss agreed to send me the application forms promptly after a telephone conversation with her. I quickly sought recommendations from my lecturers and course tutors who never hesitated to provide the required reference letters and testimonials. I then submitted my application packet and waited for the outcome which was at first negative. However, I never gave up. I applied again in 2003 and on May 31st 2003, I received an email notifying me that I had succeeded in securing a scholarship to settle my huge fee arrears! I was too bewildered to believe it. In fact, at first I thought it was one of those internet hoax or scams! Then, the real truth dawned on me when I was asked to provide the university's bank account details to facilitate transfer of funds.

I had never felt such relief in my life! Though I was still one year away from my graduation, I felt like I had already completed my studies! The most memorable moment came when Madam Eli Weiss informed me that she would be visiting Kenya and was looking forward to meeting me!! We finally met at the Karen Blixen gardens in Nairobi and this gave me the opportunity to finally discuss my financial situation and academic progress in a face to face interview. Wildize Foundation had changed my life in immeasurable terms! I informed my single mother about the scholarship. I told her I had finally met with the person who had made an indelible mark in my life! I remember her praying the whole night, thanking God for extending a hand to her needy son through unknown people in America!

Due to my hard work and resilience, the Foundation undertook the funding of the whole of the remaining academic year and I successfully completed my Bachelor of Education degree course in 2004, graduating with honours. As a sign of my gratitude to the Foundation, I dedicated my research project to Madam Eli Weiss of Wildize Foundation for the huge financial support.

I will forever be indebted to Wildize Foundation for enabling me to acquire higher education which has opened up unlimited possibilities and helped me to discover and

foster my unique potential. Because of this, I have been able to nurture the future of many students as an English teacher in various secondary schools in Kenya. With the help of a friend, I have also been able to teach English as A Second Language overseas in the republic of Seychelles. Besides, I have also gained invaluable experience and skills dealing with people of different backgrounds, appreciating their cultural values and diversities.

I am extremely honoured to be a recipient of this year's Wildize Foundation Scholarship to pursue a taught Masters degree in International Development at the University of Manchester in the UK. I strongly believe this course will equip me with the necessary skills to contribute generously to the development of communities and societies that are deprived and economically isolated. Studying in the UK which is a developed country will also broaden my perspective and enhance my exposure to more participatory and advancement tools which I can utilise back home. Having come from a very humble background myself, I anticipate participating in programmes that directly address the needs of the people because I strongly believe development begins with developing an individual. Part of this course involves visiting one developing country to assess development programmes and also to gain field and real-life experience of development management issues.

Hopefully, after completion of this course, I look forward to working with development partners, NGO'S and humanitarian organisations in striving to achieve millennium development goals such as fighting poverty, environmental protection programmes and educational initiatives.

It may sound too ambitious but surely, having come so far from the humblest of beginnings, only the sky can pose a limit to my development goals and dreams. Because Wildize has cared so much for me, I also feel obliged to care for others too in whatever capacity. Needless to reiterate that: "We only have one Earth, if we don't care, who WILL"? For certain, we do not know when or how the earth was created; we have neither strength nor the capacity to improve it beyond its architect. Understanding the complexities of its beauty and natural diversities should form the basis of our need to protect and conserve our environment!

Thank you.

Vincent Erick Owino Oguda WZ: 134