



It Is All About Perseverance

Stephen Kaggwa once said: “Try and fail, but don’t fail to try”. Over the years, one thing I am sure I’ve learnt is that nothing will go as you plan, and although frustrating, the key to success is to never give up. Sure, there were times I doubted; there were times I feared; and there were times I just couldn’t bear *it* anymore. *Nothing seems to work; nothing seems to make me feel better, to make me feel that I am making progress.* Those thoughts were depressing and at its point tore me from the inside. However, whilst having to deal with a disintegrating family, a new place of study and what seemed to be its sequel, there was always something that kept pushing me, that kept forcing me to just confront it with a smile, although fake, take the positives only and move on.

I may not have much memories of how my household was since the only moments we actually spent together were when I was one and two years old. As I grew up, however, I began to know the *story* of how it actually was. Version after version from my family, I couldn’t help but to think *Wow! That was a mess.* The most heartbreaking version came from my mom (since the versions of my other family members were filled with blames). She told me that from the beginning, she always wanted to have a united family since she herself had experienced the feeling of a disintegrating family: screams, constant fighting and arguments. To make my story short, my mom and my dad were having too many quarrels and arguments; screaming and fighting between them was like the usual every day, so my father, at the first opportunity he got, decided to leave to the United States to give us a ‘better life’ when I was two years old, leaving my mom and I alone. It wasn’t only months after that we got to know

that he had begun another family at the United States. I hate to put my father as the villain of the story, but since up to date he still refuses to talk about the topic, I don't have any evidence not to.

Growing without a father sure was hard; but that taught me self-discipline. Due to the situation, my mom had to work to sustain us both. She worked in a very demanding job: there were times I wouldn't see her for a complete day until the next day while she was sleeping and I was getting ready for school. There were actually very few times my mom helped me get ready for school. Since my first year of primary school, I had to learn myself: I had to learn how to set an alarm to wake up early; I had to learn how to put on my pants, my school shirt, my shoes and the annoying process of tying them. I learnt, at a very young age, to prepare my breakfast (at least the usual fried eggs and beans). In the afternoon, the same story was repeated: my mom wasn't at home so I had to do my homework by myself and find the way to continue excelling in my studies. There were many times I wished for more time with my mom, but, even at a young age, I understood why she wasn't always home, so I tried my best not to be an *obstacle* in her path to give me the best life she could. I saw the bright side of it. These circumstances were teaching me to be responsible at a very young age, which later became handy.

When I was in standard IV in Guatemala, my mom, on a normal day, came with the proposal to study in Belize. I was both shocked and amazed, but I was up for the challenge and I was signed up for Standard III (although I had already finished Standard IV). So, as part of a project of moms in Flores, I began to study in Belize. The process was almost inhumane: I had to wake up at five in the morning and take the bus carrying all the participants of the project from Flores to the border; the same process repeated in the afternoon, posterior to which I still had homework to deal with. At that point, I knew nothing of English, so the homework would take me triple the time it was supposed to. To make things worse, I understood nothing at school since all was taught, obviously, in English. There were nights I cried, wondering why I had accepted, but then again, tried to see the bright side of it: *if I somehow learn English, one day I'll be bilingual!* So I pushed a bit over taking the extra mile, and every night, after doing my homework, I would watch videos which taught English. Little by little, I learned and became more successful at school. A story I will live up to is when results began showing. When I started, there was this kid who was the *smartest* of the class and would always brag about it. By first term of my first year, I reached second place, just below him; by second term of my first year, I tied him in first place; by third term of my first year, he was second and I was first. Then, in Standard IV, my term averages went 98 for first term, 99 for second term, and 100 for third term; this caused me to be promoted to Standard VI immediately, so I skipped Standard V. Afterwards, in Standard VI, I won first place national for the Math PSE, second place at district level for Cayo, and ninth place national with a score of 93.8. This even granted me two scholarships: one from the government and one from the Belize Education Project, being this last one the one I took. This all thought me that if I had ever given up, I wouldn't be where I am now, but the biggest challenge was yet to come.

When I moved into high school, I couldn't travel everyday as I used to, since time would not give me, so I had to stay in Belize to finish my high school years. In the first year, I stayed in a family house in Santa Elena. Since I had grown much attached to my mother,

it was very hard for me to now live far away from her. However, I had come all this way and I wasn't going to give up just yet. So I stayed there: the self-discipline I had previously learnt from my raw beginnings were about to pay up. There, I cleaned my room without being asked; I got ready for school on time without anyone having to pour a bucket of ice water on me; I washed my clothes and the dishes I used. Nevertheless, the abrupt separation from my mom started having its negative effects and I fell into a deep depression from which I am still recuperating. I eventually moved from there to another family house in Benque where I stayed for my second semester and second form. Eventually, I had to move due to arising problems between the husband and wife of the family (I felt it like a déjà vu from my own life). So, I moved once again to another family house in Benque where I only lasted a semester of third form due to problems I had with the children of the family (the fact that I had grown as an only child was not helping at all). Now, I am currently staying in Melchor for, I hope, the remaining of my studies. However, all the experiences I gathered from the different households I've lived in taught me one thing: you got to keep trying and never give up.

All these experiences have taught me that perseverance is actually what will help you get through this life. If you keep trying and trying, at some point, it will be worth the while, but you must also know when releasing the rope is better than holding tight to it, as I realized in the first and third houses I stayed in. Plus, hardships will never end: they are part of life; we have to learn to deal with them in a positive way. I am currently still struggling with hardships, but in a positive way and one in which I apply what I've learnt and learn something new. That voice is still there, telling me to continue pushing on, to continue working for my goals, to never give up, and to always *do di rait ting*.

-Nery Villeda