

What did you see when you looked out of your window as a child?

Joseph Muyungi: I grew up in a simple mud house on the edge of a small village in Western Kenya, one room for ten people, a thatched roof. We children slept on the floor, no table, no chairs. We cooked outside on the hearth and took baths in the nearby river. In the mornings before school, we helped our father plow the earth. There was corn and sweet potatoes. We also had a few cows who gave milk, goats and chickens. There was plenty of space to run around - unlike the kids today in the slums of the big cities, which are much too cramped.

What was your favorite place as a child?

The football field in the village. My family has a talent for football. Victor Wanyama, who plays in the English Premier League, belongs to our clan. His brother McDonald Mariga is midfielder at Inter Milan and one of the twenty best players from Africa.

What was your biggest dream as a child? What is your biggest dream right now?

I had high expectations of life. We thought we would find an apprenticeship and work after school. But that's not what happened. If you want to make something of yourself in Kenya, you have to bribe schools, teachers and exam committees. Without money, you don't get anywhere, and I didn't have any money. When my father died, I was twenty-one and went to Nairobi. An uncle paid for my training as an electrical engineer. When I got my first job, I funded the education of my siblings. I got married at twenty-six and we had five children. My wife died in her mid thirties. Later I remarried and now I have two more small sons who are younger than my ten grandchildren.

How has Kibera changed since you've been here?

The bad thing is that kids can hardly move today. There are too many people here now, and there are always more. There used to be clean water and adequate toilets. Nowadays, everything is dirty, there is no garbage collection in the slums because it is too expensive. When it rains, everything gets muddy, and it rains a lot in Nairobi. The children have long school days, and when they come home, they have to work. They have neither time nor space to play.

What did you do as a child when you came home from school?

I swam in the river, helped around the house and in the field. In the evening, we sat around the fire and my mother told us stories. I don't know why people don't tell stories anymore, maybe because they're always coming home so late. Our parents had a lot of time for us; they were around all day long. But my father did not talk much.

What was your greatest wish as a child? What is your biggest wish now?

I was very devout and wanted to be a priest. God meant everything to me. Later, I had doubts. I have seen so much suffering, so many sick, crying children. So many deaths. What for? It's hard to believe in God when there is so much misery, but I do it anyway. It is the eternal struggle between God and the Devil. Life is a trial, and people have to make decisions. But that does not explain why children have to suffer.

What do you see when you look out of the window?

Jeff Otieno: The narrow alley in front of our hut, where people sell vegetables. It's loud, and there is trash everywhere. A woman is kneeling on the floor and mixes dirt with water and residues of coal, forms them into small heaps, leaves them to dry in the sun and sells them. We use them as cheap fuel for cooking.

What is your favorite place?

In school, because I can read there. At home we have no books. I share my textbooks with my classmates because there are not enough of them. There are 45 of us in one class, sometimes even more. We're in class the whole day. I am glad that I can learn something, since it is the only chance I have for a better life.

What is your biggest dream?

I dream of becoming a great acrobat. For five years, I've been studying acrobatics with "One Fine Day - Anno's Africa". We do flic-flacs and pyramids, climb and juggle with balls. We've even won a regional competition. I hope that I can go to the acrobatics school here in Nairobi one day. Maybe I'll be famous. I practice whenever I can. Maybe I can also pass on my skills later and teach children here in Kibera.

If you could change something about Kibera, what would it be?

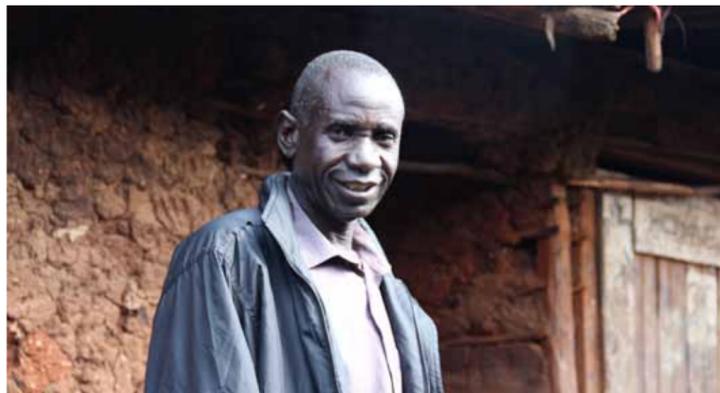
I wish it were not so hard to earn money here. I hope I can live elsewhere eventually. When it rains, it leaks, and then mosquitoes come and bite us. Last year my mother had malaria, but thank god she got better again.

What do you do when you come home from school?

First I do my homework. Then I wash my sisters' school uniforms and put them on the ground to dry. They have to be washed every day because everything is always dusty. After that I help my mother with the cooking. I like to cook.

What is your biggest wish?

A trampoline. I know that they have them in Germany, here we have no such thing. I would also like to visit England or Germany. I imagine that everything there shines and glows. I've heard that some people even have parrots at home.

QUESTIONS FOR TWO GENERATIONS**Great expectations****Narrow alleys, dirt and dreams of a trampoline - on life in a Nairobi slum***By Beatrix Schnippenkoetter*

Joseph Muyungi, 58, has lived in Kibera, one of the five slums of the capital Nairobi and the largest in East Africa, for three decades. Nearly one million people are living in a confined space in houses made from mud and corrugated iron. There is no garbage disposal, almost no toilets, no water treatment, no health insurance. The only hope to escape this misery is education. Those who can raise the money to send their children to school are lucky. Muyungi grew up in Western Kenya together with seven siblings. His parents were illiterate. They had a small plot of land on which they grew vegetables. Occasionally they sold cotton, enough to send their children to the village school. When his father died, Joseph Muyungi went to Nairobi, hoping for a place to study. Nairobi offered nothing to his family but a life of poverty.

Photos: Schnippenkoetter

Jeff Otieno, 12, born in the Kibera slum, lives with his family in a wooden shack, seven to a room. The parents share their bed with their three young daughters, whereas Jeff and his brother sleep on the dirt floor. They cook on a little stove, they do the dishes outside in plastic buckets. There is a public restroom nearby, it costs two Kenyan shillings to use. It is a hole in the ground. Only one of two children in Kibera goes to school. Jeff is one of them, a sponsor in England pays for his school fees. Jeff's passion is acrobatics. Every week, he attends classes organized by "One Fine Day e.V.", a charity project by Marie Steinmann and Tom Tykwer that offers art, music, dance and theater lessons to children in the Nairobi slums and thus gives them hope for a better life.

If you had had enough money as a child, what would you have bought?

We had a small coin bank. In a year, we got about fifty cents together, half a Kenyan shilling. That's incredibly little money but we were able to afford clothes with it. When I was seventeen, I spent the first money I earned myself on a bed. I had sold some cotton to the cooperative. The bed cost 30 shillings, about 25 cents.

What did you dislike most as a child?

When a bird cried at night and I couldn't sleep. Then I ran outside and tried to chase him away with stones. And when the lions came to our village, we could not leave the house. There were also buffalo, hippos and leopards, and the hyenas that killed our goats were especially bad.

What noise did you find most disturbing as a child?

The wailing in the village when someone had died. People wept loudly and screamed. We were told that when someone dies, their soul chases you. That scared us. I was too frightened to go see the dead.

What would you rather not have experienced? What would you rather have not seen?

When my grandmother died, I was eleven or twelve years old. Twice a year, we walked six hours on foot to Lake Victoria to visit our grandparents. My grandfather was a fisherman and took us in his boat on the lake, and my grandmother always told us fascinating stories. When we came for her funeral, they dug a hole in the ground and put her inside. There was not even a coffin.

What did you miss most as a child?

I did not feel that we were missing anything. We always had enough to eat. We did not mind sleeping on the floor, we used sack cloth for covers. My parents could neither read nor write. When we got mail, I read it out loud to them. I have to say, even though we were very poor, us children in the country used to be better off than the children in the slums today. We were self-sufficient and there was clean water. Today, the only thing that works is electricity. Children have to hang their clothes from the ceiling in plastic bags to keep them away from the rats.

What else is different today than in the past?

In the past, parents chose spouses for their children. They paid some money to the other parents, and you were not even asked. I still decided for myself because I went into the city and was independent. Of course I liked it better that way. But when I see how many marriages end in divorce today, I wonder if the old system did not have its advantages. These days, marriages barely last at all.

What do you dislike about Kibera?

It is very difficult to raise children in Kibera, there are drugs and crime. The Kibera slum is one big pile of dirt, and it's getting worse.

What do you like about Kibera?

You can survive here with little money, you don't need much and there is a strong solidarity among people. Poverty strengthens the sense of community. But for the youth it is difficult, and it's very hard to get out of here.

If you had enough money, what would you buy?

New textbooks, exercise books and pens, mine keep getting stolen. And if I had a lot of money, I would buy a real house for my family with seven rooms, one for each of us, and four bathrooms and toilets.

What do you dislike most?

When my teachers or my mother beat me. They beat me on the back with a stick if I make a mistake. I wish I was already sixteen, then I wouldn't make so many mistakes anymore.

What noise do you find most disturbing?

The cry of an eagle. Some people say that if an eagle is flying over your house, a person you love will die.

What would you rather not have experienced?

One time, my father and I took the bus to the countryside to visit our family. At night, the bus driver fell asleep at the wheel and we almost got into an accident. The police arrested the driver. We had to wait ten hours for a new driver to get there.

Who or what do you miss the most?

I miss my uncle. Like many others, he escaped from the violent unrest and the massacre here in Kibera after the 2007 presidential election. He wanted to go to Tanzania and we have not heard from him since. No one knows where he is or if he's still alive. And I wish I could attend the courses from "One Fine Day" every day. There is nothing like that at the schools here in the slums. There we can develop our talents and realize our dreams.

What have your parents told you about when you were a child?

That I always liked to climb. And when I was six years old, I got very ill. My parents took me to my grandmother, who gave me medicine. She burned a chameleon and gave me the ashes to eat. It tasted terrible, like dirt, but it helped. After two days I was healthy again.

What do you dislike about Kibera?

It is so dirty and poor. The water is contaminated and flows into stinking rivulets through Kibera. And when it rains, it comes into our house, too.

What do you like about Kibera?

Nothing, except that my family and my friends are here. It is my home.