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*Filename:* **Chimimba\_031005**  
*Diarist:* Michael A. Chimimba  
*Received:*  
*Typist:* Karen L. Cook

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**05/10/03**

When I was in from town at Vingula Community Day Secondary School, I had a friend by the name of Edington Mbeta. This one was a very close friend that even parents at home knew him because we used to do a lot of things together like studying or even washing clothes during the weekends.

Being close friends like this, we also used to come on top of every student when it came to class tests. Everyone was surprised by our friendship that even Mr. Chadza, our commerce teacher encouraged our friendship.

But after writing our form four exams, though we gave each other corresponding addresses, we did not write or meet each other for 3 solid years from 1996, the year we wrote our exams, until 1999. We just met accidentally in Blantyre at Nando's Shops and when he saw me, he said he couldn't believe that what he was seeing in front of him was me. We greeted each other and chatted for a short while, each one of us explaining the life experiences for the past three years that we left school. I told him of the Let's Chat project and he also told me that he has just been enrolled at the Malawi Polytechnic studying journalism.

I was surprised because ever since, I have never heard that the Malawi Polytechnic offers Journalism courses. He then told me that the course was just introduced that year and that his group is the first intake of that faculty. He gave me his room number and Hostel's name, Lumando Hostel Room No 38 in case I wanted to visit him. I did not immediately visit him until 2001 when I started school at Malawi College of Accountancy. It was just an advantage because the schools are just close by. Inside his room, I found copies of articles that he has been writing for the Nation Newspapers. We had been in touch for the time that I was at school (MCA) and when I left, I did not know his whereabouts until, on a certain day, I saw an article in the Nation Newspaper written by him titled "DIRECT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH." This was in 2003. When I read the article, it was talking of Edington himself and his experiences when he went for VCT at MACRO. In the article, he said he was afraid to make that decision but later on he just gained courage and went there. He also praised staff at the VCT Centre that they really know their job. They talk in such a way to encourage people. Even if you are HIV positive, those people give you hope, Edington said in the article.

The following week [after] I saw the article, I met with Namadikira, a girl we were together at school, who also happens to be related to Edington. When we met, I first asked her of Edington's whereabouts. She then told me that he has started working for the Nation Newspaper as a full time journalist.

When I heard this, I started thinking of visiting him. It was then on the morning hours of 12<sup>th</sup> July that I visited the Nation Newspaper. The place is very secured because right away at the gate, I was asked so many questions and when I answered those questions; questions like my name? Where I live? Who I want? Business or personal visit? I was told to enter and ask the receptionist. The receptionist then led me to the Library where I found Edington and his friends watching television. Edington welcomed me very well and I also sat there watching the television as well. There was a football match between English teams which I did not follow about their names.

After watching the game, Edington took me to his office. It is not a closed office as such, because in the room, I found six desks, three on each side, and if I am to borrow from OFFICE PRACTICE & PROCEDURES'S subject that I learnt from Malawi College of Accountancy, this is an open plan type of office. When we were there, Edington bought me a drink and we were discussing different issues. We reminded each other the days we were at school and he also told me how he struggled to find a sponsor for

his studies. He said he nearly left school because of lack of school fees until the last minute when his loan scheme application from government got approved.

Later I told him that I wanted to leave and he then started escorting me. When we were out of the gate, I told him that I wanted to congratulate him for being found HIV negative after having a test at MACRO (based from the article that he wrote) because these days, its very rare to find courageous young men who can go for test like he did.

In his response, Edington first said "Oh welcome Michael, but you know, AIDS is a very difficult disease for one to get,"he said while looking straight at me. I am sure he was expecting questions. I asked as to what he meant, then he started explaining that AIDS is very difficult to contract because he said it gives you chances. "You can have sex today with a bargirl and the chances are 99% that you can't get HIV. But if you keep on having unprotected sex for quite a long time, say more than hundred times, then the 1% remaining will be accumulating and that will also make a 100% chance of getting HIV. AIDS is for careless people so to say. And for your own information Michael, I got circumcised when I was in third year,"he concluded.

I then asked him why he thought of getting circumcised at that age. "I had sores at the foreskin which also affected my member and the doctors advised me to just get circumcised. They also advised me on the importance of getting circumcised apart from getting rid of the sores.

They said I stand a better chance of coming out without bruises whenever I have sex as compared to those people who are not circumcised and they further said that those bruises, that one gets during sexual intercourse are very dangerous because they do increase the chances of getting sexual transmitted diseases."

I quizzed him about the sores, whether it was an STD, he then told me that they were just sores which he thought came about because of heat, because he said it was during the hot weather.

"So, Michael, this is the place. Please, whenever you have time, visit me."Edington said as we were shaking hands, bidding each other farewell.

### **05/10/03**

From Edington's office, I went straight to Dali township where I live. My hair was long and I wanted it shaved. I went to Makalani's barber shop, to get my hair shaved. While there, I found that there were other people who were being attended to. I waited for my turn.

When my turn came, I sat on the chair and when he was about to start shaving me, a well built middle aged man came in. I had known this man for quiet a long time. Not by his name no but just a person whom I have just been meeting with. When he came in he was talking to Makalani, who was then shaving.

At first I did not know what they were talking about because the man started by telling Makalani that 'they haven't started.' And then Makalani, in his response said that the MACRA (Malawi Regulatory Authority) a body which looks after communication.

Later on, I knew that they were talking of a telephone bureau which was about to be opened but they had not yet given the license to operate.

They talked about different issues which were not relevant to diary writing but when he left, I then asked Makalani about that man whether he was a Muslim by birth or he was just been converted to.

In response, Makalani started by praising Mr. Daniel, the owner of the barber shop for doing a good job. He said, since he came to Dali, he has converted almost 6 people to Islamic religion. He said "with this one, he first started by asking for employment and later pleaded with Mr. Daniel to help him become a Muslim Mr. Daniel did not hesitate. He took him to the Mosque the following week to introduce him to the congregation,"He continued "but why did you ask that question?"he asked me.

In my response, I told him that one day I went to the Mosque to pray at around four o'clock, and later I saw him among the congregation. At first I thought that he was indeed a Moslem but later, I realized that he had problems in praying. He was being taught on how to pray.

Makalani then continued "problems came for him to get circumcised."

"Aaah! was he not circumcised?" I asked.

"Yes," Makalani replied.

"Mmh, what happened," I asked.

Makalani thus started narrating that at first, the man was afraid to get circumcised but he said when he was told about the importance of getting circumcised, he even took his young brothers for circumcision. He said, "for him to get convinced, I just asked him a question saying that suppose there are two people who want to cross a river which has knee-high water. The other person is putting on pair of shorts and the other one is putting on a pair of trousers. And these people want to cross at the same time, who do you think can cross faster without wetting the clothes?" Then he said that the man said that the one in shorts was the one to cross faster without wetting clothes but the one in a pair of trousers will take time to roll up the trousers before crossing, and eventually wet the clothes.

Makalani then said that he linked that simple story to circumcised and uncircumcised men. Those who are circumcised are like a person putting on a pair of shorts and those who are not are like a person putting on a pair of trousers. And in terms of sexual transmitted disease, a circumcised person stands less chances of getting infected as compared to the uncircumcised person. He then said, upon hearing that, the man got convinced and requested for circumcision. He further said that since he was circumcised, he has never regretted. He said that he even congratulated him for having helped him with that idea of getting circumcised.

While we were still discussing this story, Ganizani joined us. He found the conversation already in progress but it did not take time for him to pick up what we were discussing. He knew that it was about circumcision and he joined by saying "we will have a lot of people circumcised because of this AIDS. Even doctors have started advising patients to get circumcised. And by the way, Michael, do you know that Rashid Nyirenda and Shawn Chiwalo got circumcised last year for the same reason?" he asked.

"No, I don't," I replied.

He continued by saying that Shawn had contacted sexual transmitted diseases on a number of occasion but when he got circumcised, he hasn't got any. "People have seen the importance of getting circumcised.

### **14/10/03**

The other day when I and my brother, Abraham were chatting outside our house, he received a call on his cell phone. From the conversation, I learnt that the man on the other end was asking my brother when he would join him; because I just heard him saying "I will either on Saturday or Sunday and report for duties on Monday." From this statement, it's when I knew that he was being asked when he would join him. When he finished talking I asked him who he was and then he told me that it was Harrison, a Zambian who is also working at the same company.

My brother is working there as a driver and he said that Harrison is working at quarry, breaking stones because their company is a construction company. He then started telling me how he befriended this Zambian. He said that on a certain day, he and Harrison went on Monkey Bay to offload cement and wheelbarrows. While there, they heard that there was a band performing at a certain bar and they thought of going there to get entertained. They got drunk and finally each one of them got a girl to spend a night with. The following day, life was normal, they both headed for Zomba where their office is.

Two weeks later, my brother said, he was again sent to Tyholo, this time he did not tell me why he went there for but said that when he came back, he was told that Harrison is sick. But since he was fired, he said that he thought of visiting him the following morning. He did as planned and when he entered into Harrison's room he said he felt a very stinking smell and flies everywhere.

He said that when he saw that, he immediately thought of gonorrhoea because, he said even the bedsheets that he was using were all soiled and stinking.

He further said that when he asked him what his problem was, Harrison quickly remembered Monkey Bay. Instead of mentioning the disease he was suffering from he just mentioned Monkey Bay while crying. My brother said he calmed him down and started asking him what his problem was. He then started narrating the symptoms that he was feeling, a sign which assured my brother that Harrison did not know what disease it was despite knowing that it was a sexual transmitted disease.

He was told that he felt pain when passing out urine and at the end sperms would come out. He said that sometimes, the sperms would just come out even without urinating but they had a very bad smell as if it is rotten.

Then my brother said after hearing that he asked him what medication he was taking but instead of Harrison replying to my brother's question, he said, he started crying again while telling my brother that the company has denied his request to have the car pick him to the hospital and he said, he wanted to go to the hospital but he is failing to walk, and therefore, there is not any medication that he is taking.

Then my brother said that he went to the nearby shop and brought him 24 capsules that he was advised to take four capsules daily.

When I heard that, I asked my brother if his friend recovered by only taking those capsules he was talking about. In his response, he said Harrison was also taking traditional medicine and that's why he recovered quickly, he said "From that time, our friendship grew stronger and stronger. He even confessed to me that among all the people who are working at our company, he regards me as his true friend,"he concluded.

As if he forgot to tell me that, he continued by saying "Eeeh, sexual transmitted diseases are very dangerous indeed, you remember the time when I was driving Rashid's minibus?..."

"Yes,"I replied.

"... I also got the disease when I went to Mulanje but I was very fortunate because I quickly realized that it was an STI before your in-law knew about it. All what I did, I went to Nyasalande Private Clinic and told him that I have an STI and that I will come with my wife but don't reveal to her that I have an STI."

I asked him "How did you manage to do that to a doctor, is he your friend?"

"Yes, he is ... aah Nyasalande, he is my friend and when I came with your in-law, we were all given injections and were advised not to have sex for a week."

"What disease was it you were suffering from?"I asked him.

"I guess it was also gonorrhoea because I also felt pain whenever I urinated."

"So why did you bring my in-law to the clinic as if you also transmitted the disease to her?"I asked.

"Yes I did because when I came back from Mulanje, I also made love with her just to make her not suspect that I had been unfaithful. This was the time that I infected her,"he said.

**21/10/03**

In August on a Saturday morning, when I was at home, I decided to go to the trading centre to buy relish for the day. I took my bicycle which needed to be punctured and headed to the trading centre. When I reached the trading centre, I went to Mr. Walemu where I left my bicycle to get fixed while I was buying the relish. When coming back, I decided to take a road which is behind Vingula Market passing by Traditional Authority Luka's house. I was surprised by the gathering that was at the chief's hut and when I was about to pass by, I met with Lamusoni and I asked him what the problem was. He told me that there was a dispute between a Sheikh and his mother. It started last week and was adjourned to today. "It's a very interesting case,"he said.

"What is it about?"I asked him.

"The Sheikh is accusing his mother of brewing 'KACHASU'(traditional Gin) and he wants her to stop but the mother is saying that he can not stop because if the Sheikh claims himself to be the Sheikh it is because of money that the mother was getting through brewing Kachasu that she was able to pay for his school fees and later boarding fees," he said, and I really knew that is was a very interesting story worthy listening.

I then went to Mr. Walemu to see if he was through with the work. I did find my bicycle already fixed and I asked how much he would charge me for the service. He said K25.00 only and I just fumbled K20.00 and gave him. He did not say anything, he just received the money and laughed. I headed home with a plastic bag carrying the fish that I had bought on that day.

When I reached home, I told my granny that I will come late for lunch because I said I will be in the trading centre attending to some other business. She thanked me for telling her in advance.

I went back to the trading centre and headed straight to the T/A's house but still the case was not on. I then decided to go to Tayitasi's house just to pass time. I knocked at his house's door and his wife came out.

"Where is he?"I asked.

"He is bathing, just get in,"the woman said as she was gesturing me to enter into the house.

I got in and sat on a sofa chair and the woman greeted me. Later, Tayitasi came putting on a Chimimba –(a cloth that most women put on) as he was coming straight from the bathroom. He did not greet me at the time but he only said "Yes, Michael,"as he was going to his bedroom. When he finished, he came and greeted me and then asked me a question "are you not attending to the case?"

"Which case?"I asked.

"The one at Chief Luka?"At this time, I came back to my senses and told him that I was only waiting for time. "In fact that's why I am here, I have heard about that when I came to buy relish this morning" I told him.

"Okay let's go. I am also going there. It's a very interesting case indeed,"he assured me.

We went to the place (Traditional Luka's Court) and found that there was another case which was in progress. We attended to that case while waiting for the actual case that we had come for to commence. The case which we found in progress was about a dispute over land. The people did not agree on the boundaries of their land and in conclusion, the chief said that he would be sending his counselors to see how the land is being used and later decide what the boundaries are.

Next to be called were the people involved in the case between the Sheikh and his mother. It was the husband to the mother, the Sheikh himself, and the mother.

As these people were being called, Tayitasi murmured to me, "that is the case now,"he said in a very low tone.

The people went straight in front of the T/A where a space was left for the people involved in a case to sit. I really wanted to know the people's names but contrary to what I was thinking, no name was mentioned instead, they were just called by their titles, Sheikh, mother (mama in Vernacular) and BABA (father).

When the people got seated, the chief's counselor, who is well known in giving fair judgement, Mr. Ussi stood up and said,

"The chief has thoroughly considered your complaints mum but it seems that there is a conflict here between religion and our custom. I therefore request you that you better take your case to your Sheikh of the area you are living so that he should advise you on the way forward. I think that is the only way we can help. That's what I have been told by the T/A to tell you,"he said.

The people then stood up, left the place and joined their fellow friends where they sat. To my surprise, and to some other people's surprise as well, most of the people left the place when Mr. Ussi announced that which proved that most of the people there had come to attend to that case.

Now, as we were coming back from the T/A's house there was a hot debate as to who was wrong and why.

First to speak was Mr. Vundo who said that the mother was wrong, because he said the mother would have stopped brewing the beer and listen to what her child was saying because it was like God had sent her a prophet.

But Tayitasi did not take that lightly. He said "no ways, the Sheikh is very stupid. When did he know that beer brewing is bad? Why did he wait to finish his studies first? He is a Sheikh and should just mind his own business and leave his mother alone,"he said.

At this point, since I did not know that story in details, I asked Tayitasi to explain to me what the story was all about. At this time, Tayitasi said that there was a Sheikh and before he continued, Mr. Vundo cut him, "he is Thengoliweta's son,"and Tayitasi continued that when the Sheikh was young, before being a Sheikh, his mother used to brew Kachasu, which she is still doing as her business, and used the money to send that Sheikh to school. He was going to circular schools as well as to Madrassah. He excelled in both studies and he was later given a scholarship to Tanzania courtesy of money generated from beer brewing business. During all these years, the so-called Sheikh did not say anything neither did he caution his mother that beer brewing is a bad business.

Now after he has finished his studies, he is coming back to his mother saying that he should stop that business because he says it is against God's laws. The mother is then saying that she can not stop brewing Kachasu because that is the business that she knows best and said for him to know those laws, that beer brewing is bad, it's because of the very same beer that he is accusing today. Now, he said after being annoyed by the mother's resistance castigated her saying that she was double crossing his step father such that the fourth and fifth born children are not his step father's children.

At this point, Tayitasi then asked me; is that right Michael? Can that happen to any sane person talking like that to his mother?"

Before I answered, Mr. Vundo joined and said "No, what we are saying here is that the mother is wrong. She could have listened to what her child was telling her. Anyway we can say that the child was wrong in the way he told his mother. He did not say that in a polite way,"he concluded.

I then agreed with Mr. Vundo saying that he was right. I said that a person might stop a bad behaviour or might not stop according to the forum used in accusing the behavior. For example, if the Sheikh invited his fellow Sheikhs and complained that to them and plead with them to talk to his mother, I am sure she could have known what the people meant. And the mother would have known that her child, the Sheikh does respect her, and not the way he did.

"Sure," Mr. Vundo said.

But Tayitasi and Batani did not have fair words to the Sheikh. They both said that the Sheikh was wrong. He could have known that at first that beer brewing is bad and could have told his mother to stop. But by letting his mother continue brewing the beer so that he should continue with his school that being hypocritical.

The debate ended in that way, Tayitasi and his friend Batani did not agree with I and Mr. Vundo were saying.

**07/11/03**

Month-end of August when I was in Blantyre, I decided to enter into town from Dali township where I live.

I boarded a minibus and when the minibus was negotiating a corner at MDC ground, just at the corner, there was a white Toyota Corolla which stopped and the driver was talking to a woman who had put on [was wearing] a black pair of jeans trousers and a white blouse.

The minibus driver was disturbed with the way the car was parked, taking into account that it was parked at a corner which was against traffic rules.

Annoyed with that, the minibus driver slowed down and started shouting at the Toyota Corolla's driver. "Why can't you find a better place to park your car and be talking to your prostitute? By the way, do you know that there is AIDS?"

At this time, most of the passengers also joined in, UFATUI UFA! (you'll die) and then the minibus driver started speeding on his normal speed leaving the other driver speechless. While driving, he still continued discussing the other driver's incident saying that it is sad that still there are people who take women as their friends despite seeing a lot of people dying of AIDS. Up to the point of parking his car wrongly like that! Had it been it was a fellow man, he couldn't have risked himself by parking at the place.

Then another man, who put on [wore] a white shirt and a red necktie with his spectacles on said that he heard a certain man at Lingwana tavern saying that when person dies of AIDS, that's an honorable death because the person has died of a disease coming from the place he came from – meaning that the person is born through the woman's private part (vagina) and when he dies of AIDS, the disease transmitted through sexual intercourse [is] an honorable death.

Many people including myself laughed a lot because I did not know that there are other people who do think in that awkward way. That man seemed to have a lot to say but he was the first to step down from the minibus which made the story to end in suspense like that. When he stepped off, some other people were asking whether what he was talking was true or he just cooked the story.

"It may be true" the driver said and finally the minibus reached its destination.