



Khondiwa Danny

## **DEEP BLUE SEA**

LIFE STORIES OF AN AFRICAN STUDENT IN RUSSIA

МИНИСТЕРСТВО НАУКИ И ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ  
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Khondiwa Danny arrived in Tyumen in 2016 from Zambia. He learned Russian language at the Preparatory Faculty of Industrial University of Tyumen. He started writing about his studies and life in Russia in the year 2017. At the moment he is going onto further study in Tyumen.

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*Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always keep in mind you have the strength within you, the patience inside, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.*

*Harriet Tubman*

*To my mother Bertha.  
Thank you for your love and support.*

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## FOREWORD

– Wake up! – she said enthusiastically with a tiny smile lingering at the edges of her lips.

Mum never comes into my room this early on a Sunday morning... I thought to myself. I could see her holding a newspaper in her left hand but I could not clearly see what was written on it because I was sleepy. I reluctantly rolled to the other side of my bed so that I should not face. How I wished I could be left alone to keep on sleeping but it became apparent that my mum was not ready to give up yet. She came close to my bed and woke me by shaking.

– Why are you disturbing me so early in the morning on a beautiful, sunny Sunday like this? – I questioned her.

Instead of giving me an answer she sat down on the bed beside me and handed me the paper she was holding in her hand.

I have always known my mother to be the kind of person who would go out of her way to help anyone in whatever way she could and her children were no exception. She once told me that what she did not manage to do while she was young, she would now do through her children. She wanted to live her dreams through the lives of her children.

I got the newspaper from her, and it was opened to a certain page with the words

«Russian Scholarship» written on it.

I had always known from a young age that my body was home to a wandering mind, a mind in search of answers to questions that few would ask. My mother understood this and she always encouraged me to take huge leaps of faith. She was there every single time cheering me on as went chasing after my dreams and moving little mountains. When my mother handed me the newspaper, I knew it was time for me to achieve my dream of studying outside my country. I knew it was time to move 12000 kilometers away from home to a foreign land.

Now fully awake I read through the Russian scholarship advert. I wanted to study civil and industrial engineering but was disappointed when I noticed that civil and industrial engineering was not amongst the courses available in the scholarship. I decided to apply for architecture engineering which was closer to civil engineering as it also involves building.

The application process was long and tedious but nothing comes easy and free in life, you always have to work hard. For me to get the scholarship I first had to write an application letter indicating what course I wanted and why I should be allowed to study outside the country. Together with the application, I attached: a curriculum vitae, copies of school results, school achievements, and a synopsis of how my chosen specialty was to help develop Zambia.

My decision to study in Russia had its challenges. It was a decision I had to think about for a while because I knew it was not going to be easy to be away

from home, away from the cordiality of my family and friends, away from the environment in which I grew up and knew, away from Zambia and away from Africa. It was even more difficult because not everyone close to me was ready to support my decision to study so far from home. I was told, “Russia was racist, Russians are not so friendly, that I would freeze to death from the cold Siberian weather or that I will be eaten by a bear”. But despite all this, I still decided to take my chances and applied for the Russian scholarship.

I decided to study outside Zambia and particularly in Russia for several reasons. I think it did not matter what country I studied in, I just sought for the opportunity to experience something new, I had lived in Zambia my whole life and it just seemed right that I should go to another country when I had the opportunity. My mind is adventurous and always for new and exciting opportunities. I chose Russia because it was one of the countries that offered a free full scholarship which meant I could study for free, who does not like free things? Other countries that offered scholarships were China, India, Turkey, Morocco, and Egypt. I decided to come to Russia because I was eager to find out how it feels like starting life all over again in a new place, learning a completely new language, making new friends, tasting new food, experiencing different weather conditions (snow), witnessing and falling in love with a new culture, falling in love over and over with a new kind of life. I wanted a new start in everything.

Zambia has great universities and educates competent engineers and other professionals. I was accepted to study at the best university in my country. I chose to study in Russia not because my country does not have good universities but because I was given the opportunity to travel over deep blue seas to a foreign land.

Applying for the Russian scholarship was the first step in getting the scholarship. The scholarship board of Zambia gets more than 1500 applications on average but only calls the best 300 applicants for interviews. I was fortunate enough to be among those who were called for interviews. The interviews were conducted by seven panelists comprising of the deputy minister of education, a representative of the Zambian scholarship board, and 5 qualified engineers. During the interviews, I was asked different questions ranging from why I wanted to study architecture engineering, how would I help develop Zambia after graduating, to why did I choose to study in Russia and not Zambia. I was among the 125 applicants that were awarded the Russian scholarship in different fields like my case engineering, others were awarded scholarships in medicine, pharmacy, biotechnology, nuclear power physics, and computer science.

After I have been given the scholarship, I was required to choose six Russian universities that I would want to go and study in. I did my research about the best universities in Russia. I applied to two universities in Saint Petersburg, two in Moscow, one in Kazan, and one in Vladivostok. After a few

months, I was accepted at Tyumen Industrial University of Tyumen. IUT was not part of the universities I chose. I did not even know that a city called Tyumen existed in Russia. Back home people mostly know Moscow and Saint Petersburg and hence chose universities in these cities. After I was sent to Industrial University of Tyumen, my specialty was changed from architecture to building engineering. I always dreamt to study building engineering and so I was excited and grateful that my specialty was changed. I did not choose Tyumen, Tyumen chose me and it was love at first sight, it was love that dated back the moment I arrived at the airport.



## STILL HOME

*Been born African is the best thing that has happened to me and  
am proud of it every day.*

What immediately comes to your mind when you hear the word «Africa»? Your mind probably paints the following picture: a place with no clean water to drink, no electricity, people living in trees, lions and elephants walking down the same road as humans, kids with malnutrition running naked in the mud, poverty is synonymous with the word Africa. When you hear Africa you probably imagine meaningless wars, misery, suffering, corrupt governments, and famine. One other thing is that you imagine Africa as a desert with temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius. Africa for you is probably one big country with the same language and we all know each other. This vision of Africa has been existing for as long as the world has known that there is a place called Africa.

Africa for me and a million others is more than just a place to call home; it is more than a place where I was born. Africa is a symbol of love, peace, and happiness. Africa is where family is, the place where I learned how to be kind, how to respect others. Africa is more than the stories in the media. It is a place of opportunity and growth. It might not be heaven on earth but Africa is a beautiful place, not because it has the highest buildings nor the strongest economy. The people are a reflection of the beauty Africa holds.

Let me tell you about the Africa I know and not the single-sided story of Africa you have heard in the media. I say “single-sided story of Africa” not because the stories in the media are not true. Some stories are true, while some might be exaggerated. In as much as it hurts to admit it, Africa is poor but that is just one single story. There is another story about Africa that can only be told by someone who understands what it means to be African. There are always two sides to a coin just as there are two sides to the African story.

A child was once asked about what they knew about Africa. Without wasting time, the child enthusiastically answered “they live in the jungle” I was not surprised by such an answer from a young boy of not more than five. It is probably the same thing that the parents would have said. The problem is not the answer given by the child, the problem is that the African story has been told by people who are not Africans and do not even live in Africa. It breaks my heart to see that the only time Africa appears in European media is when they talk of wars or people dying as a result of a disease outbreak when they show children dying from hunger and thirst. Just like any other continent, Africa has its challenges and problems. For instance, the Ebola outbreak in Western Africa, the ongoing war in the democratic republic of Congo, the drought and famine in Somalia, the high unemployment rate in Zimbabwe. Focusing only on these negative aspects of the African story is not telling the entire story of Africa and this deprives the African people of their pride and identity. The danger of the

single-sided story that has been told about Africa is that it has created stereotypes that have robbed its people of their dignity.

There are other stories about Africa that are not about catastrophe. It is equally important to talk about them. Stories that bring the bright and good side of Africa to light. I grew up appreciating my beautiful, African identity. I have seen how African people are strong and hardworking, welcoming and loving despite the many challenges they face. It is part of the African tradition to always share the little that one has.

It is in Africa that you will find the brightest, broadest and sincerest smiles. Africans understand that happiness is not measured in how much one has but is a result of the people around us, people that make our lives complete and meaningful. The beautiful African story is the story of a people willing to hold hands through the storms. A story of a people rising in unity to fight the colonial masters who once oppressed us. The beautiful African story is the story of thousands of students who travel each year to different parts of the world in search of knowledge and skills so they can help in creating a better future for Africa.

Stories of how Africa has some of the most beautiful cities and places in the world should be given the importance they deserve. Africa is a civilized continent with big beautiful cities like Cape Town, Accra, Lusaka, and Cairo. It is home to some of the natural wonders of the world like the Victoria Falls, the Nile River, the Serengeti migration, and Mount Kilimanjaro. The Most beautiful landscapes and wild animals are found in Africa.

Africa is not one country nor is it a federation as perceived by many Russians. Instead Africa is a continent like Europe or Asia and is made up of 54 different countries with different diverse cultures. The people in South Sudan are different from the people in Zambia just like the Russians are different from the Kazakhs. It is not much correct to believe that all the Africans you meet come from the same country, later on, city. In as much as I am African, I am firstly Zambian just like a Russian is Russian first then he is Asian or European.

-Hi, are you from Africa? -a stranger asks.

-Yes I am -I reply

-That is a wonder, I have a friend John from Cameroon who lives in Moscow, and do you know him?-

-Firstly, no I do not know him; secondly, I am from Zambia which is a different country. I need to get on a plane and travel for almost a day to get to Cameroon so not only do I not know John, we do not even live in the same country.

Africans do not speak the same language. In addition to French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese Over 2000 different languages are spoken in Africa. Each African country is known for its uniqueness.

Tanzania is well known for its hospitality and large extended families. Strangers and visitors are considered members of the family while children are very respectful and are required to kneel when talking to elders as is a custom in many African countries.

Egypt is well known for its pyramids and is often referred to as the land of the pharaohs. Cape Town in South Africa is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The great Victoria Falls otherwise called the «Mosi-o-tunya» in one of the local languages which translates into as the smoke that thunders is found in Zambia. Victoria Falls is the largest waterfalls in the world. The falls are also one of the seven natural wonders of the world. The world's second-largest manmade lake in the world the «Lake Kariba» is also found in Zambia. Ghana has arguably the best soup in the world called «Pepe soup».

My home town is called Ndola sometimes referred to as the «friendly city» Ndola is the industrial and commercial center of the Copperbelt province of Zambia. The city is the third-largest in Zambia in terms of size and has a fast-growing population. It is clean and most streets are lined with trees, providing shade on the sidewalks which are wide and perfect for a good walk.

The city is home to several interesting tourist attractions which beckon one to explore. Animals do not walk in the streets of the city. They are kept in the reserved areas where one can find animals like lions, buffalos, hyenas, elephants, and a wide range of other wild exotic animals. Ndola city enjoys a relatively cool and warm climate. The average highest temperature is around 28 degrees Celsius while the average lowest temperature is 14 degrees Celsius.

I know my hometown Ndola like I know my palms. I lived there for most of my life. I learned to love everything about the city even its imperfections. I know its secrets and all the beauty it has to offer. I know of its friendly people and their willingness to always help. So, if one day you wake up and feel like taking an adventure, if you feel like visiting my home town, call me I will be glad to give you a tour.



Africa should not be viewed as a land of catastrophes but as a land of untapped potential which is home to thousands of ambitious, brilliant young minds. Am blessed to be African (Zambian) just like we all are blessed to be who we are.

## ON MY WAY

*All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another.*

*Anatole France*

The time came for me to leave home and start a completely new life in a foreign land. I was envious of the blue seas in a foreign land, how it roared, so wild and free. I chased after the blue waters of the deep sea. In my quest to be an educated man I left Zambia and all that was dear to me. I had my Russian visa and plane ticket ready. I carried with me food from home so that while I was adapting to Russian food, I could eat something familiar to me and reminded me of where I was coming from. I said goodbye to my family and friends but unfortunately, I did not manage to see and say goodbye to all those I held dear to my heart. A sad kind of feeling hovers above my head when I think of people I did not see before leaving. My elder sister immediately comes to mind when I think of the people, I wanted to see but could not, life has its way of doing things. She was in school and could not come home to see me off at the airport.

I still remember my mother's last words to me before I left. Lovingly she looked at me and held my hand and said in a soft but firm voice, one she usually uses when she is serious and wants you to understand "Son, you are going to a foreign land, a land you do not know, may my words and commandments be with you, in times of troubles and trials they will comfort you. Whatever happens do not forget the road that leads you home, for you shall find me waiting here for you. Always remember why I have sent you away, focus on your books. Alcohol and drugs will destroy you do not entertain their company; they will cloud your judgment. You have not gone to find a wife, get your degree first, and will discuss you're getting married. Never forget my God, your God who has brought you this far" I looked at my mum. I wanted to tell her something but I could not. It is hard to find words when you have something to say but even when you find the words, you just do not know how to say them and so I kept quiet and hugged her tightly. I showed her through my actions and silence that I understand what she had told me.

Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2016 is the day I left Zambia for Russia. It was an emotional day not only for me but for another 125 students who were leaving their

loved ones behind to go in pursuit of dreams farfetched in a land unknown to them. Both my parents had come to see me off at the airport. My father made a promise to me. He told me; he would come for my graduation ceremony. He promised me he will proudly stand by me when I will be getting my degree. He promised to be there to cheer me on as I walk the podium to get my Russian degree but unfortunately, this was to be his last promise to me because a year after I had arrived in Russia, I received sad news from home that my father had passed on. My father and I rarely saw eye to eye on most things but he was still my father and I miss him. The worst part was that I could not even travel home for his burial.

A man with a dream has the potential to achieve greater than he dreams about. What started as a dream for me was now a reality. I was finally leaving my home country to pursue my dreams. The truth is that it is hard to say goodbye to things and the people you have known and loved for your entire life. When I got on the plane that evening, I left everything behind. It was one of the toughest decisions I have ever made but I choose to make the necessary sacrifices to fulfill my dream of becoming an engineer.

I started from Lusaka international airport to Dubai at 9 p.m. It was my first time on a plane. The experience was not as I thought it would be. Before my flight, I had heard a lot of stories from people about flying for the first time, stories have been told of how people who flew for the first time become dizzy or could not hold their stomachs and threw up. My flight from Lusaka to Dubai was 9 hours long, I spent most of the time on the plane watching movies. I do not remember sleeping during the flight because I was too excited and I was scared that if I closed my eyes for even the tiniest moment, I would not have the full flight experience. I was served broccoli on the flight, it was the first time I had tasted it and I have never eaten again since, it was my first and last time, sorry but the vegetable is horrible. I arrived in Dubai at 6 on Monday morning.

During the flight, I sat next to three guys who would later become more like family. I met Mabanda, Kenneth, and Boston for the second time on the plane. The first time we met was at the orientation ceremony held in Lusaka for students going to Russia. It was this ceremony where I met all the six other students that were going with me to Tyumen. All seven of us who were coming to Tyumen come from different parts of Zambia with different stories and backgrounds. We were only brought together by the common dream we had of pursuing our dreams away from home and so here we were in Dubai, strangers but now brought together by fate.

When I arrived in Dubai, I was among more than fifty Zambian students traveling to different parts of Russia. Other students out of the total of one hundred and thirty who were given Russian scholarships had either traveled earlier or were going to travel later than us. Out of the fifty students that arrived in Dubai, only four of us had been booked on a different flight traveling to Moscow from Dubai. While the other students left for Moscow at 8 a.m. I,

Kenneth, Boston, and Mabanda had to wait for 17 hours for our flight to Moscow. I do not understand why our flight was booked for a different time but spending time in Dubai was a great experience. I and my three friends almost missed our flight to Moscow. It so happens that we were waiting at the wrong terminal because we thought we would board the plane to Moscow at the same terminal where our friends had boarded from. Fortunately, we got to our flight on time but we were the last passengers to board

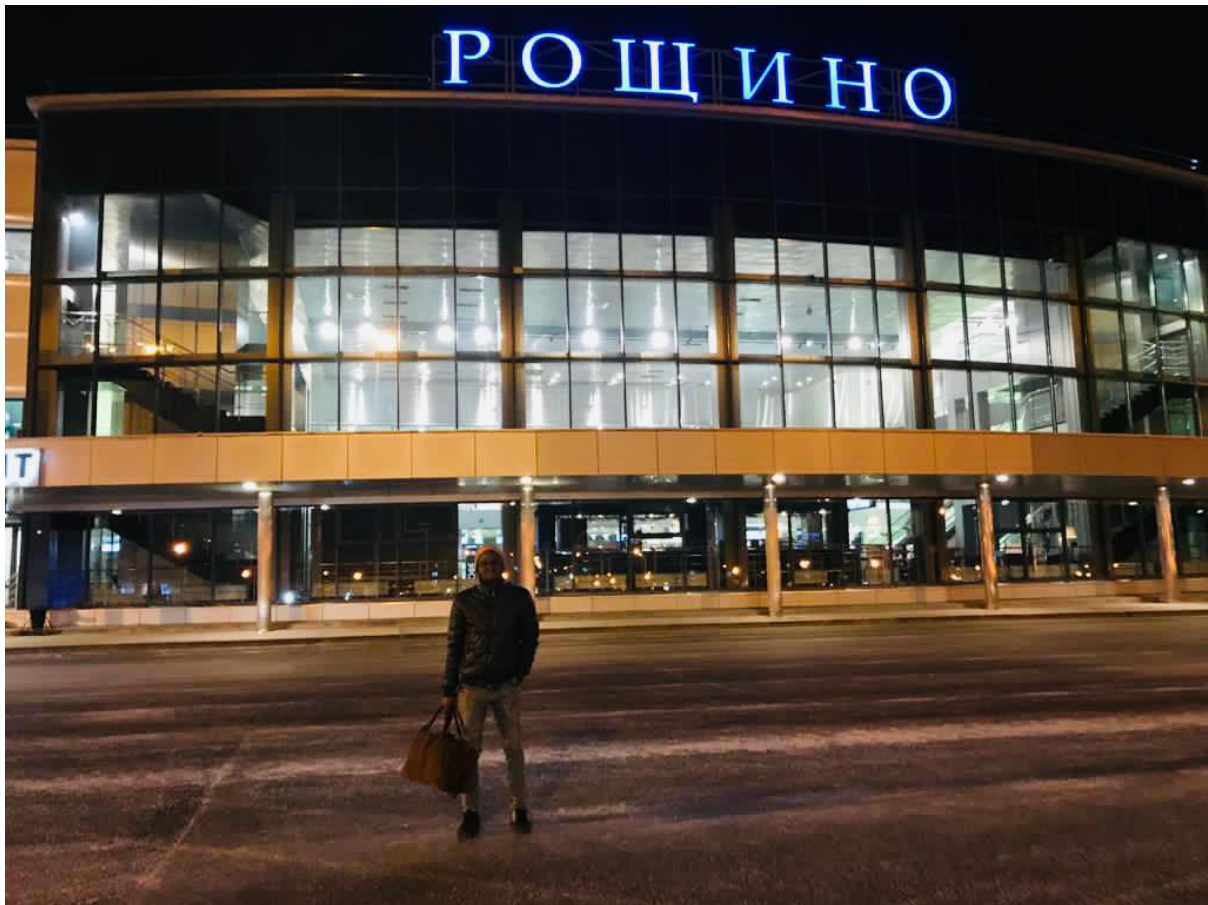
The flight to Moscow was smooth and nice. I sat alone next to the window while my three friends were sitting in the same row next to each other. I had the chance to appreciate the beautiful, blue skies outside my window. The view through my window was mesmerizing; it looked like nothing like I have ever seen before. The skies were not only beautiful but it was like they told their own story of freedom and elegance. The flight from Moscow to Dubai lasted for five hours. When we arrived in Moscow, we were greeted by the Moscow night lights. There is quite nothing like seeing Moscow city from a thousand meters in the skies.

I arrived in Moscow at Domodedovo international airport around 9 p.m. Moscow time. I did not spend much time in Moscow because our flight was scheduled to leave after two hours. I finally got on my last plane to my final destination at around 11 p.m. The flight from Moscow to Tyumen lasted for about three hours. During the flight, I sat in between two Russians, an experience I still remember till now. Both men wanted to talk to me. They were curious and wanted to find out what a young black man was doing on a flight to Siberia (One of the coldest parts of the world). At this moment I did not even know how to write my name in Russian so there was no possibility of me even having a conversation with them. One of them tried so hard to speak to me in English but I would only manage to nod every time I heard a familiar word in English. I nodded and smiled as a sign of courtesy not because I understood what he was saying. After a few attempts at asking me questions and trying to make me understand, both men realized we were not making progress and that it was pointless to continue asking me questions that I could not understand because of the language. When they stopped asking me questions, I decided to close my eyes and take a nap. The next time I opened my eyes I noticed the air hostess removing plates of food from the other passengers. I had missed my food while sleeping. Wonder why she did not wake me up, I was hungry and could have gladly eaten.

After almost two days of traveling, 15 hours on a plane, covering more than 12 thousand kilometers away from my birthplace and crossing over deep blue oceans, I had finally arrived in Tyumen on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2016. I had arrived at the place that was to be my home for the five years I was to spend in Russia. So here I was in a foreign land, ready to conquer, geared to learn and make the dream of becoming an engineer come true. I spent almost my entire life in one city, I never traveled far from home, I was a homeboy but I once told my mother, "I have not had the chance to travel far but one day when the time is



right, I will travel to a land far away from here, a land of new opportunities.” My mother always tells me there is power in words and so here I was at Roshchino International Airport in Tyumen, thousands of kilometers away from home.



When I and my friends arrived at the airport, we were warmly met by two Ghanaian senior students Eben, Eden and Evgeny, the man in charge of foreign student affairs at the Industrial University of Tyumen. The university had organized transport for us from the airport to the hostels. Our journey to our hostel was quiet because we were all tired and exhausted. All I wanted was a good night sleep. I had barely slept in the last two days during the journey. Despite being tired, I managed to enjoy the night lights of the city with the cool breeze of autumn blowing through the window. As the winds blew softly and tenderly, I thought of all the possibilities that lay ahead of me. The new friends I would meet, the new opportunities and chances, the new food, a new city, completely different weather, learning a new language from scratch like a baby learning to speak. All these thoughts were spinning in my head on that beautiful night. As I looked through the window of the car into the darkness, I took a deep sigh of contentment and realized a whole new life was waiting in front of me. From this moment onwards, anything and everything was possible.

## AT LAST IN TYUMEN

*Traveling means debunking  
other people's misconceptions about other countries.*

*Aldous Huxley*

‘Plus two degrees?’ I asked Evgeny, the person in charge of international students. He had come to pick me and the other Zambian students at the airport. I had finally arrived in Tyumen, Russia. It was Tuesday, October the 13th, the time was around 6 in the morning. I asked Evgeny what the temperature was upon arrival, I could not believe it was +2 °C. This was the coldest weather I had ever experienced in my life. +2 °C at that time was so cold for me, I could not imagine how people survived in such cold weather. Evgeny looked at me and smiled “+2 is warm, the weather can get as cold as -30°C during the coldest days”, he informed me. I looked at him and shouted “what! can I buy a ticket and go back home where it is warm?” I could not even begin to imagine what -30 °C would feel like. After spending some years in Russia, winters are still the hardest part of the year for me. The snow is beautiful but it is too cold. My Russian language teacher once made a joke about Siberian winters, “during winter, Russians become ninjas”



Yes, no, of course. If you want to seem like you know any language these three magical words can help you in any situation. When I first arrived in Tyumen, these three words were very helpful. Language is beautiful. Learning



the language of another country shows that you embrace their culture, it shows you appreciate the nation and what it stands for. Language does not just make communication easy; it is also a way of showing that you are interested in another nation's way of life. Learning another language helps you to some extent understand a lot about the people that speak that language. It helps you understand, why they eat what they eat or dress how they dress, why they behave the way they behave. People are most likely to accept you as one of them if you speak their language, take for example, whenever I meet someone and they realize after talking to me that I can speak the Russian language. They become interested in me as a person because we now share something in common, no matter how different we are, once we speak the same language, we can always find other common interests. Because of language, my first months in Tyumen were both hard and funny. I remember an incident at church when I was approached by an old woman probably in the late sixties. She started asking me questions.

–Do you like it in Tyumen, yes?–

–Yes, yes, yes–

The good part about most Russians is that they always give you an option of either saying yes or not at the end of the question. I noticed how the woman would either put yes or no at the end of each question. This happened barely a week after I arrived in Tyumen so I only knew the three magical words “yes, no and of course” Notice how I say yes three times. That is another trick you use when you do not know fully a language. Say yes or no several times when you are answering just to show the person you are speaking with that you are following them and are interested in what they are saying.

–Is it very cold for you here, yes?–

–Yes, yes, yes–

–Do you have a Russian girlfriend?–

–Yes, yes, yes–

The woman smiled.

After this happened, my Zambian friend who was standing nearby and listening to my conversation with the old woman pulled me aside. He used to learn Russian in Zambia so he knew the language better than me.

–Did you understand the last question the woman asked you? – he asked

–No, not really, why do you ask? –I said.

–Why did you say yes then?

–I did not want to seem rude by not answering her.

–She asked you if you had a Russian girlfriend and your stupid head said yes–

–What, I have only been in Russia for less than a week, how can I have a girlfriend. I do not even speak the language.

–Well, – he said and left.

Have you ever walked into a shop, you have the money but you do not what food to buy? This happens to me most of the time. This problem is that

most of the vegetables and fish we have in Zambia are not available. It was very hard adapting to Russian food the first months after my arrival. The way everything is cooked is different from how it is done in Zambia. In Russia, there are always three dishes. The first one is soup, the second is rice with meat and salads, then finally you drink tea. In Zambia, there is only one meal which usually consists of hard cornmeal with meat or fish and vegetables. Russian food was strange at first then over time I began enjoying the food. I realized it was good food. Nothing is as good as borsch among the soups. Plov is delicious and Russian pancakes with honey are topnotch. I started learning how to cook some Russian dishes. I learned how to make pancakes (“bliny” in Russian), manty, plov, and pelmeni (like in Italian ‘ravioli’). I tried making borsch at one time. It turned out sweet as if I had put sugar in it. Up to now, I have never tried cooking Russian food alone.

I felt like a movie star when I arrived in Tyumen. Strangers would run up to me and ask to take photos with me. I have taken photos with people on a lot of occasions. At first, it was all fun and cool. After some time it becomes condescending. I started feeling uncomfortable taking photos with strangers without knowing where they are taking the photos. To avoid taking photos with people I would jokingly tell them taking a photo with me will cost five hundred rubles. I would smile and then walk away. Sometimes I would just pretend to be busy or just bluntly say no. Some people would just behave very rude and would take pictures of me without even asking as if I was an exhibition at a museum. Whenever I noticed someone taking photos of me without asking I would take out my phone, open my camera and take pictures of them. I mean an eye for an eye.

Bus rides at first were very uncomfortable because almost everyone would be looking at you. It is similar to being in a horror movie, you enter a bus and everyone turns around and looks at you like “hey, we are about to eat you!” After some time, I got used to the attention and just stopped focusing on it. Whenever I find someone staring at me, I stare back but if it is a child, I smile and sometimes wave. Sometimes, parents would whisper to their kids to look at me. Sometimes people are just genuinely happy to see me. They would walk up to me, hug me, and ask a few questions like where are you from? what are you doing in Siberia? Do you like it in Tyumen?

Apart from the weather, the food, the language, and people staring at me there are some things that were unfamiliar to me. One that stands out the most is the first time I saw a girl smoking cigarettes in public. I know some girls smoke even at home but I had never seen any girl smoke publicly until I arrived in Tyumen. This is one aspect of the Russian culture that is different from my culture.

Though days will pass by, time will fly by and one day I will return home, Tyumen will always be my second home. Tyumen will always have a special place in my heart. Even though memories will be lost with time and my

mind will forget some places, there is no doubt my heart will always beat to a rhythm that reminds me Tyumen is the best city in the world. I will always have fond memories of the lover's bridge, the beautiful night lights, the city's friendly people, the cool breeze that blows from river Tura in summer, the hot springs in winter, the aroma of fresh coffee in the evening, the cold, white Siberian winter, the beauty of Respubliki Street. All the times spent with friends in Gilyovskaya Roshcha will always remind me of the beautiful forests around Tyumen city. Gilyovskaya Roshcha is the place you go to when you need to unwind and catch a breath of fresh air away from all the noise of the city. Tyumen nights are calm; the wind blows softly during autumn as you go on exploring the beautiful sites of the city. As I walk home along Lenina Street near the Lover's Bridge, to my left lays out the Geolog Stadium. The stadium recalls my childhood memories because at one point I dreamt of playing football professionally. To my left lays out as well the historical square with beautiful benches that beckon you to sit on them and enjoy the fresh summer air as you look at the magnificent lover's bridge.



In front of me, Lenina Street runs down a slope, at a far distance I can see the Construction Institute which shines with its different colors. It is the institute that has been assigned with the task of making me a competent future engineer; it is within its walls that I shall be taught how to build. The university is more just four walls to me. It is more than just classes and endless course works. It is more than unfinished laboratory works and assignments. The University for me is a place with students eager to learn, wonderful teachers willing to share the knowledge they have. It is about creating friendship and ties that will last a lifetime. It is an opportunity to fall in love. It is a chance to discover who you are. I step back and see how far I have come and so am reminded as I look in front at the Construction Institute that the future indeed looks bright.

Beautiful country, beautiful people, beautiful city, wonderful culture, rich language, delicious food, horribly cold winters, strong vodka, this for me is the Russian spirit. Of course, it is practically impossible to define a nation using a few sentences but this I believe is the Russian spirit and I feel privileged to have experienced a part of it during the years I have been here.



I was born, raised, and lived in Zambia my entire childhood. I could not imagine what it would be like traveling to a completely new place, with new people, unfamiliar culture, a different language. Most of the time for most people the thought of leaving the comfort of their homeland is scary. “Russians are racist, Russians are aggressive people, they will beat you up for no reason, you will be given vodka in class because it is very cold, bears walk in the

streets, you probably never see the sun again if you go to Russia because it is cold throughout the year and the sun rarely comes out”, these are some of the stereotypes that I heard when people around me knew I was going to come to Russia for my studies. I grew up watching American movies and most Russians were portrayed as tough, and remorseless villains with a very deep English accent. These types made it even hard to imagine how life in Russia would. I remember my mother once telling me that when I go to Russia, I should only know three places, the hostel, university, and the nearest shop, any other place would be dangerous. I do not blame my mother for warning me to be outside when it is dark; this is what happens when people are told certain stereotypes. Stereotypes are dangerous because they rob a nation of its dignity. Stereotypes are told by people who probably have never even visited Russia. They are told by people with so little knowledge about what and who they speak. I have lived in Russia for some years now and I have never seen a bear, unfortunately, I have never been served vodka in class. Imagine sitting in class and the teacher gives you some shots of vodka because it is cold. I arrived in Tyumen, Russia and I was amazed at how every stereotype is so untrue, at how all these stereotypes are based on nothing and are just people's wild imaginations. Just imagine walking on Lunacharskogo Street and then someone shouts “run, there is a bear behind you” that is something I would like to see. The world probably knows little or nothing about Russian people. It is so unfortunate that the most effective way to get rid of stereotypes is for people to live and experience firsthand the culture of the people on whom these stereotypes are based. The entire world needs to come to Russia. I feel lucky because I have had the opportunity to live among Russians and hence my perception of them has changed. It is amazing how your opinion of others can change once you understand them. As I have seen the few years I have been here. Russians are kind people especially the grandmothers that sometimes gave me free Russian apples. Russians wonderful people even though they might not smile as much as we do back home, (you all should come to me for smiling lessons when you smile you need to show your teeth) but I was told by a Russian friend “Russians smile from the inside”.

I believe in four seasons of the year. I believe that winter is tough, rough, and long but spring is coming. The season of growth is on its way. Even though winter is cold I believe summer will be warm and bright. The birds will sing and whisper sweet melodies. I believe I will pick lilies in spring and watch the leaves fall in autumn. Even though my first winter in Tyumen was tough it had its bright moments. It was the first time I ever saw snowfall in my life, it felt magical looking at the snowflakes falling from the sky. I remember the time I got buried in the snow by my friends. It was during the first winter that I went ice skating. It was fun for others but scary for me. I watched kids skate past me. I could only envy them. The first time I could not let go of the sides of the skating rink. It was like I was holding on to my dear life so I did not let go of



the sides of the rink. Every time I let go, I would fall shamelessly on my back. After several attempts and a thousand of falls, I finally learned how to skate. It is a wonderful feeling gleefully sliding on the ice. The four Russian seasons of the year are new to me. They have different names back home. Winter and spring are called the cold season, summer and autumn are called the hot and rainy seasons. For me, Russia has two seasons, winter and summer. The reason for such thinking is simple. In autumn and spring temperatures range from +14 to +0°C. For me, these temperatures are still cold, it still feels like I am in winter. It is like winter lasts for nine months. Summer is my favorite season among the four seasons, it reminds me of home and I think most people are happier during summer because of the possibility of having not to worry about wearing a lot of clothes to keep warm. Summer means freedom, summer means I can wear shorts, summer means outdoor football. Summer means watermelons.



My first year in Tyumen, Russia was the year of discovery. Everything was new and unfamiliar. It was full of first-time events. I ate borsch for the first time. I learned how to skate. I went to the hot springs for the first time. Snow falls on my face for the first time. It was a year filled with so much to learn, so much to fall in love with, it was the year of settling down and getting used to my new environment.

## PREPARATORY FACULTY

*Knowing many languages means having many keys to one lock*  
*Voltaire*

When I and my friends told our Russian language teachers we did not understand what they were teaching us, they taught us even louder and faster. That is how I learned the Russian language.

Before coming to Russia I knew that it was going to be difficult for me to learn a new language. We are gifted differently. I knew language was not one of my gifts. I had come to realize this in my twelfth grade during biology classes when I found it difficult to pronounce certain biological words. Despite knowing that I had problems with learning a new language, I still decided to travel to Russia and learn one of the most difficult languages in the world. I constantly reminded myself that if others managed to learn the language so would I.

We had the first lesson two days after we had arrived in Russia. During the first lessons, we were learned cursive writing, the Russian alphabet, and the pronunciation of the letters. The most difficult sound was that of the letter *ы*. The hard sign and the soft sign were also tricky. I still struggle with the pronunciation of these letters, like how can one pronounce a letter with no sound? The hardest part about learning the Russian language for me personally was and has probably been pronunciation of most words and sounds especially new ones. I take days sometimes weeks to learn how to correctly pronounce certain new words. There was this once I had to defend my laboratory work in physics. I perfectly understood what I had to do to defend the work but there was this one word I had to constantly repeat just to get the right pronunciation. During my defense, I still pronounced it wrongly.

Our Russian language course was divided into three parts; the first part was grammar, which was taught by Anna Alekseevna Okhalina, medium height lady who was very active. I remember one day when she asked to accompany her to get some books. I had to run to catch up with how fast she walked. She was serious but very sympathetic. Her lessons were tough but she taught me how to correctly use the six Russian cases. The Russian cases are like nothing I have ever seen before. How does one word change more than five times, it is a mystery I have never understand.

My group was always kept busy even when we went to our hostels because of the homework she gave us daily. My first days of learning language were the worst. I was probably the worst student in our class. I could not just get anything correct in class. My pronunciation was terrible, my grammar was even worse, my cursive handwriting seemed like it was that of a five-year-old kid. My Russian was so bad my teachers wondered why I even traveled

12000km to Russia if I could not learn anything. There were times I started questioning the possibility of me learning the language. The mountain in front of me seemed so high, it felt I could not push it or even climb over it. It was a challenge too big to overcome.



One day we were in class learning grammar and Anna Alekseevna turned to me and asked me “Danny, why do you stay in the hostel?” I was caught unaware so I could not think of any proper answer with the correct grammar. A friend whispered from behind me and gave me an answer which did not make sense but it was better than me keeping quiet. I raised my head, looked at the teacher with an uncertain voice I answered “well, I live in the hostel because it's cold outside”. The expression on the teacher's face changed from been serious to a face of laughter, so she just smiled at me in response. My Russian begun to improve probably three months after we had started learning. My grammar teacher realized I was not a bad student; it just took me more time to understand what we were learning and once I did, I began doing relatively well in class. My teacher started expecting me to give the correct answer every time she asked me a question. She would be disappointed and reprimand me every time I gave a wrong answer or if I had forgotten something. Whenever I got an answer wrong, she would always say “ayayayi Danny” while nodding her head from left to right. This encouraged me to even study more.

The hardest part about learning any new language I think is learning the rules that govern the language. I come to know for the first time in my



life that the name of an object or person can change forms and how it's pronounced several times, six times to be specific when I encountered Russian cases. For most foreign students' Russian cases are probably the most difficult part when learning the language. The Russian cases made life difficult for me because I could not understand what form of a word to use in a particular situation. Of course, apart from Russian cases, there are other parts of the Russian language that are extremely difficult to understand like the conjugation of verbs.

Olga Vasilievna Kopylsky is a teacher you are most likely never to forget after attending her classes. You will easily remember her sharp answers that are always straight to the point. No beating about the bush. Her facial expressions whenever a student makes a silly mistake when either reading or answering a question will make you think twice about every next word you are about to say. Above all, you will remember her for her assuring smile that tells you in silence that everything is going to be alright despite the challenges that you face now. One thing I immediately liked about her lessons was that she rarely gave us homework. As a student, there is nothing more relaxing than not having to worry about school while you are home.

Olga Vasilievna taught me the second part of our Russian course which was general science and mathematics. In her course, I learned the language that is used in mathematics and science. I had three lessons at the most with her in a week and these lessons were never boring. She always kept us engaged in different interesting topics ranging from the names of elements on the periodic table, how to correctly say fractions in Russian, how to describe the movements of objects in physics.

Memories help us look into the past with a smile and give us hope that there is a better tomorrow. Time will move on. The sun will rise and set. Time comes as days and goes as years. We were young and now we are grown but memories have stayed fresh. The only thing I knew when I first arrived was how to say 'hi' but now I can have conversations in Russian. I can even write books in a language that seemed nearly impossible to learn. Memories of her loud but tender voice still ring in my head. The mother of our class. The one we run to when we had problems. The one who took us to the markets and malls in Tyumen. She was there from the beginning and up to now memories of her are as fresh as yesterday. We may have moved on from her language classes but her impact is still visible even today. Evgeniya Igorevna Stebunova was our class teacher and was responsible for us. She was honest, frank, and did not keep herself waiting long to tell any student who she felt was not giving their level best to build up steam.

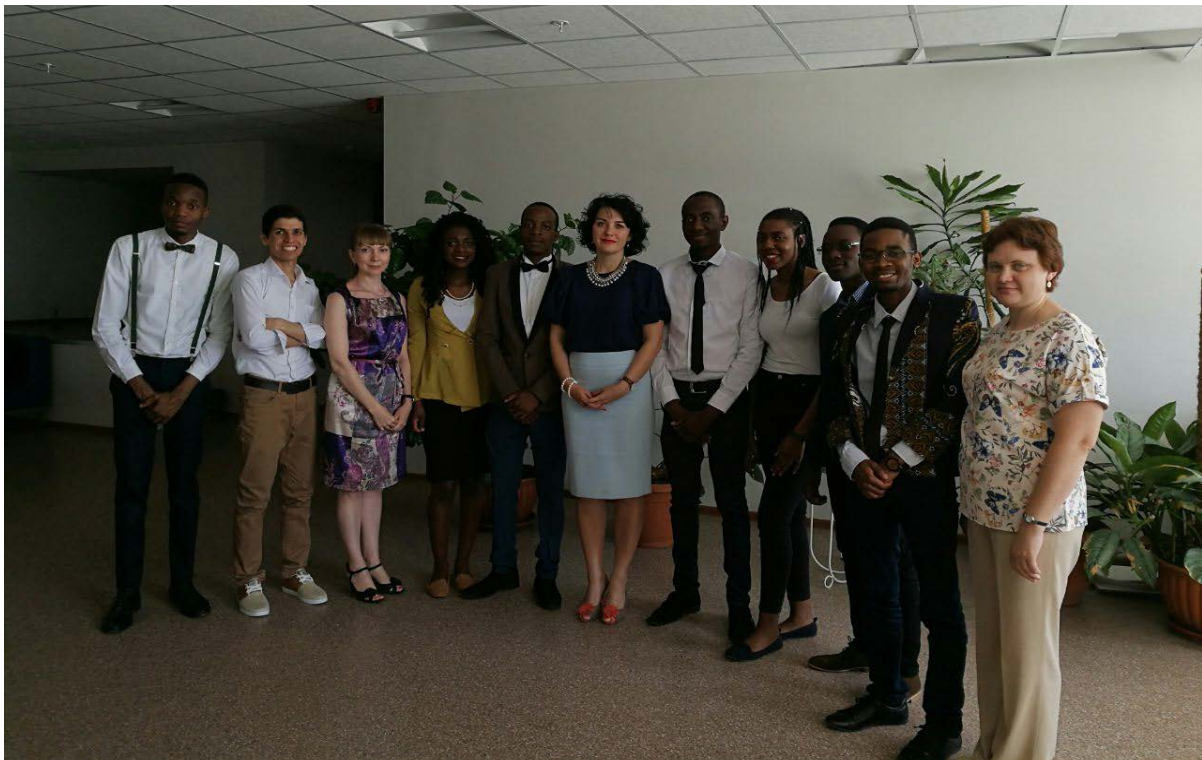
Evgeniya Igorevna taught speaking, writing, and pronunciation which was the third part of my Russian language course. She taught me how to correctly speak, pronounce words, and sentence construction. We had lessons with her

almost every day sometimes up to four classes in a day. From the very first lesson we had with her she spoke as fast as the speed of lighting. Every time she spoke during her classes she kept eye contact with me because I sat on the very front desk just directly opposite her desk, a sitting position which I later regretted because all my actions were constantly monitored while my friends who sat at the back had the opportunity and freedom to indulge themselves in all manner of different pleasures like using their phones in class. Because she was looking at me, I had to constantly nod to indicate I was paying attention and understood what she was teaching. At times I just nodded without even understanding what she was talking about. It got to a point where she started noticing that during her lessons I was mostly lost at sea and had fallen off the wagon of understanding. After talking continuously for several minutes she would then turn to me and say “yes, Danny” to ascertain whether or not I was paying attention. Realizing I was caught not paying attention in class, I would jump like a baby who had just been woken up from a good nap, with my eyes and mouth wide open I would answer in surprise “yes, yes, yes, yes.” I couldn’t think of any other way to reply to her apart from saying yes so I said yes several times to assure her that I understood when I did not. When she asked me to explain to her what I understood, I would drop my face down and look at the book that lay open in front of me. The empty book stared back at me, I could not write that which I did not understand. I would then turn to my neighbor, Masiliso, the girl who sat next to me, and ask her in our local language if she had understood, she would then tell me what to say. Every time I said “yes,yes,yes” Mustafa, my friend from Algeria could never stop laughing at my answer and made friendly fun of me. Every time he met me, he would say “yes Danny.”

I had learned Russian language for 4 months before other subjects that were related to my field of study in this case civil and industrial engineering were introduced. I started learning Mathematics, physics, drawing, history, and chemistry. Chemistry and history were the two subjects that I enjoyed the most. In my history class, I developed an interest in the life of Ivan the Terrible. I felt he was one of the most contradictory characters in Russian history. While others thought of him as just cruel and a savage for nothing, I thought of him as someone who brought about many reforms that changed Russian history. My interest in Ivan the fourth’s life and reign would later see me write a thesis about his reforms in my first year of study, a thesis which was awarded the maximum number of points by my history teacher. Chemistry has been my favorite subject since my high school days; I loved chemistry so much that I thought I should have been a chemistry teacher. The chemistry teacher during my language year made chemistry seem easy and enjoyable even though it was in a language I did not understand fully. My chemistry teacher knew her subject so well she would leave me amazed by how easily she did the calculations. All the subjects I learned during my language year were taught by wonderful and

talented teachers to whom I shall forever be grateful, for the knowledge they gave and the understanding they had. A good friend gives you the knowledge you need to live a better life.

Eight months after arriving in Russia, I completed my Russian language course. It had been eight months full of learning, fun, laughter, sometimes even tears. I had formed a strong bond with teachers. They were the first people who introduced me to the Russian way of life and taught me everything I knew at that moment. The day of the exams is probably the scariest in a student's life but thanks to our teachers we were ready. My Russian language course exam was a four-part exam. I first wrote the grammar test, which was followed by a dictation test. Before the exams, I was required to write and memorize ten stories on different topics ranging from my family, my favorite movie and book, friendship, life in Tyumen, my favorite Russian figure who happened to be Ivan the Terrible. I was also required to learn dialogues that are used in different situations of life, like how to order a meal at a restaurant, how to talk to your teacher, how to buy things in a shop and how to ask for directions.



During the final exams, I was required to randomly pick up a paper that had questions written on it. I picked up a paper that had a question that required me to talk about my family life history. We were given an hour to prepare before the exams began. The exams were conducted by a panel of three people

which consisted of two of our language teachers and the head of the language department who was the specialist sent by the university to give a fair assessment of our language skills. I was the first person in our class to memorize all the ten essays I wrote in class and I was the first person to take the oral exams. When I was telling the story about my family I got to a point where I was talking about my grandfather marrying my grandmother, but instead of saying my grandfather got married to my grandmother, I got confused because at that time grandmother and girl sounded very similar to me and so I said “my grandfather married my girl” I quickly realized my mistake when I saw my teacher laugh. During the exams I could not pronounce the word “bring”, the teacher asked me to repeat the word several times but I could not just get the correct pronunciation. After several attempts, the teacher realized I was not going to say the correct pronunciation so just let it be. My tongue could not correspond with my brain. The time I was retelling a story about a boy who wrote a letter using different crayons to the girl he liked. “Can you name the colors the boy used to write the letter?” asked the Head of the Department. Strangely enough my mind decided to take a break and went blank. I could not think of any other color apart from black and white so I said. “white?” in response. She asked in a surprised voice ‘how can you write on a white piece of paper with a white crayon?’ ‘I also do not know how, maybe he was writing on a black piece of paper, it was not mentioned in the story what color the paper was so it might be black.’ I responded.

Thank you to all the teachers who were there every step of the way to guide me through the language year. They made it possible for me and my friends to live normal lives in Russia because life cannot be complete without language. I saw Russia for the first time through their eyes and words.

## FRESHMAN YEAR

*Education Is What Remains After You Have  
Forgotten Everything You Learned in School.*

*Albert Einstein*

I was finally a freshman at university. It was like preparatory faculty fly by very fast. So here I was a first-year student of construction. I had learned Russian language for a little less than eight months. I did not know the language, speaking and pronunciation were extremely hard and it is still hard up to now, I guess very few people can completely master a foreign language. Despite not fully knowing Russian, all my university subjects were taught in Russian and there was no distinction between me and the native Russian speakers. I attended the same lectures and pass the same exams. The one thing that was very helpful during the first year was that chemistry, mathematics, drawing, and physics use universal language, the structure of an atom is the same everywhere, and integration in mathematics is the same regardless of the language. To understand the sciences, you need only to understand the basics of the language in which the sciences are taught. The biggest challenge I faced in my first year was the social sciences: history, law, and life safety require you to fully understand a language, there is little or nothing to calculate in these subjects. These subjects are dependent on your understanding of the language. I had always known that I did not have the gift for foreign languages and it would be extremely difficult learning in Russia but knowing this did not help lessen the difficulties I had in the first year. I would sit in certain lectures and feel like I was at the cinema, watching a movie I had not paid for, the movie was in Chinese and it had Arabic subtitles. I felt completely lost at sea during the lectures, I had to constantly check the time on my phone to see when the lecture would end.

It takes a lot of courage and energy to speak in a group when you are in the minority. When you are one of the few dark-skinned students in class, it feels so uncomfortable to speak out. In the first days of university, I was surrounded by students I did not know, so I was extremely uncomfortable contributing to discussions in class. I constantly worried about my pronunciation and grammar. One time during the first year I addressed a teacher by the informal “you” instead of the formal “you” and everyone in the class was like dude “what!!” fortunately the teacher understood that I did not mean to disrespect him. Something happened one day during the history class that pulled me out of this zone where I felt uncomfortable speaking in class. My group was given a history assignment to prepare for the next class. The following week come and I was ready as a boxer who had been preparing for his fight for months, I had done my homework, I had done the research. The history lesson started nicely, and then my history teacher Alexey Vladimirovich Suetin



explained a few points about that day's lesson. Then he allowed the group to discuss what they had researched, I did not say anything because I was afraid of making grammatical mistakes and pronunciations, so I decided to keep quiet the whole lesson even though I had prepared adequately. When the lesson had come to end, everyone stood up and started rushing out but then the teacher stopped us and told us to sit down so that he could give us points. Mr. Suetin had a piece of paper where he marked everyone's participation during the discussion. As fate would have it I sat at the backbench with three other Zambian students. Mr. Suetin started giving points to those that sat in front, most of them got fives and threes, five was the maximum. For some reason, he never gave a four. He got to where I was seated and asked for my surname. I replied him and then he looked at his paper with no emotions attached, he calmly said 'to you zero points'. The person seated next to me got zero, so did the entire backbench. After this encounter, I started avoiding sitting at the back. It was at this point, I realized there is no reason to feel uncomfortable when speaking in class. I was a university student now, I was at war with myself and to win this war, I had to conquer my fears, I had no option but to participate in class. During the next history lesson, I participated in the discussion and I got three points. Three is better than zero.



Early on in university, I realized that most of the time, it is not how hard you work but it is about how smart you work. To help me through my first year, I started working smartly. I attended all my lectures, some teachers gave marks for attendance, others did not care whether a student attended their lectures or not but I didn't skive off my classes. I tried my best to always do my assignments on time, I did not allow work to pile up. I spent more time studying subjects that I found difficult to understand like legal studies and focused less on subjects I enjoyed in class. Chemistry was my favorite subject in my first year so I spent less time studying it, I hated computer science hence I spent more time trying to understand it. I focused more on studying subjects made sure I attended every class because certain lectures awarded marks for attendance, I always tried to hand in my homework's and assignments in time, I gave more studying to subjects I never understood in class like computer studies and less time to subjects I enjoyed like chemistry.



I tried to know as many people as I could, I made acquaintances with lots of people. I had friends from older courses. This was very helpful because they shared their knowledge about how to approach teachers and some tips in passing certain subjects. I was also friends with people from my class, fortunately, in the first year, everyone was understanding and

helpful, it helped me to know that if I had problems understanding a subject, there was always someone from my group ready to help. Knowing a lot of people is very helpful. Sometimes it is not what you know but who you know that helps you in life. The teachers were extremely helpful and understanding. What mattered the most was that they saw that I and the other foreign students in my group were trying to learn regardless of the language barrier. One particular teacher I remember from my first year was Irina Leonidovna Polyanskaya, at the end of every lecture she would ask “Africa you understand?”

Even though the first year was hard, even though I had to learn everything in the Russian language, the first year also meant meeting new friends, creating fresh friendship bonds. The first year was an introduction to the Russian university system. The first year also meant I was a step closer to getting my degree.

## **FRESHMAN YEAR TEACHERS**

*All the pride of the teacher is in the students, in the growth of the seeds sown by him.*

*Dmitry Ivanovich Mendeleev*

A great teacher is worth more than any amount of pure gold. A great teacher does not only teach mathematics or mechanics. A great teacher can change a student's life in more ways than one can imagine. If you pay attention closely, in between the many lessons on how to calculate the moment of a pendulum, a great shares some valuable life lessons. You learn a lot about life just by observing great teachers. My freshman year would have had less meaning if I did not come across wonderful teachers who were always willing to share all the knowledge they had. I was indeed lucky that I was once taught by Doctor Elena Ivanovna Lobodenko, my theoretical mechanics' teacher. Among her many strong points, I think her patience and willingness to attend to any students' questions stand out. She was always ready to help. I learned that most teachers love to be asked questions, they love to share knowledge with whoever goes in search of it. Truth is that I think, theoretical mechanics is a challenging subject, it requires you to think long and hard before solving a question but Elena Ivanovna made it look simple. She made theoretical mechanics look ten times easier than it is. She explained so clearly and simply, you could not help but like the subject. I believe strongly that had it not been for teacher's patience and help, I would have failed terribly in theoretical mechanics.



Some people are born to be teachers, you can judge it from the moment you just attend their first class. I have not met up to this point a teacher as organized as my geology teacher Svetlana Petrovna Igasheva. Her lectures and laboratory work were always conducted in a very organized manner. She always kept the lesson interesting by using photos to simplify whatever she was explaining. Photo slides of minerals, earthquakes, waterbeds, or mountain rocks. The pictures contained wonderful illustrations about the topic she was teaching. Whenever she asked a question in class, students would come up with all types of theories trying to answer the question. Her words were simple, firm, and always the same.

“You are just making life difficult, everything is simple and straight forward”, she would say, then go on and explain the answer and everyone would be like oh it was that simple.

“If” and “so” if you have been a student at the Industrial University of Tyumen, then you know exactly who I am talking about. Peter Yurievich Tretyakov simply said is a genius. I think he speaks faster than any Russian I have ever met. He loves physics; it is obvious from the way he teaches. And when I say he is a genius, I mean he is a real genius. I remember once I was defending my laboratory work. He took a look at the answers I had written and he said “nope, this is not right” and then he went on to do the calculation mentally. “Ten to the power negative nineteen divides by” he murmured to himself, at this point, he was doing the calculations so fast all I could hear was bla bla bla and then he suddenly looked up at me and said the correct answer was ten to the power negative five. I was sited in front of him, surprised and tongue-tied. I was shocked at how he did such a complex calculation so fast and just using his brain and so all I could say was “oh, ok”

They are so many wonderful teachers I met during my first university days but I, unfortunately, cannot list them all, however, this book would not be complete if I did not include Yulia Valerievna Ogorodnova. She taught for me for two years and her work ethic is impeccable. She rarely canceled her classes and if she did cancel class, she would find time to make up for the class. Yulia Valerievna is undoubtedly one of the best teachers that have ever taught in my life.

I have been taught by gifted teachers during my studies at the Industrial university of Tyumen, people who were born with the heart to teach and share knowledge. They share lessons not only about science and engineering, but they tell stories about life that are filled with so much insight and unequalled value.

## FRIEND OF ALL SEASONS

*True friendship is a plant of slow growth and must undergo the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation.*  
*George Washington*

“It is better to have a hundred friends than to have a hundred rubles,” says a Russian proverb. This proverb alone summarizes the importance of creating long-lasting friendship bonds over having a lot of money. A good friend is priceless and is worth more than any amount of gold. We all need friends to support us when times are hard; we all need friends to stay with us when the whole world walks out on us. Some friends are not just friends; they are friends that become family.

Our lives would have no meaning without friends. Life would be lonely and empty without friends around. I traveled 12000 kilometers away from home, crossing over deep blue seas, I arrived in a foreign land, and had it not been for the friends I made, life in Russia would have been ten times harder. My friends have been so loving and helpful as I navigate my way through these foreign lands. My friends have become a home away from home. This chapter of my book is dedicated to my friends who have seen me through tough days and happy days, friends with whom I smiled and cried. Friends who did not allow me to give up when everything around me seemed like it was sinking.

I have met so many wonderful and cheerful people in Tyumen. I have made friends and shared memories with these people. Each friendship has been a source of inspiration, wonderful lessons, priceless memories, unending laughter, and a whole amount of love.

The very first friends I had in Tyumen were the six other Zambians that had traveled with me. I say first friends in Tyumen because before coming to Tyumen, we did not know each other. I met some of the Zambian guys for the first time at the airport. We have shared good and bad times, there are days we argued, days we do not want to talk to each other but then at the end of each day I think it is important to understand that we are all we have.

Kenneth Phiri was my roommate the first time we arrived in Tyumen. He is a fantastic person with one of the loudest laughs I have ever come across. It is very unwise to tell him a joke in a quiet place like during a lecture. One time we were sitting in mathematics class. Everyone was quiet and busy solving calculus. I made the unwise decision of telling a joke. Kenneth then burst out into an extremely loud laugh. We were sited at the back and so everyone turned around and looked at us with questioning eyes “guys really, we are in class”.

When I think of style and fashion, I immediately think of Veronica Chita. Veronica is a style enthusiast and has a successful blog that talks about fashion. Veronica is outspoken which I think is a good thing because it helps her write

great articles on fashion. She is a great person and easy to relate to. She is an engineer with style.

The other Zambian friend that has become more like a brother is Boston Katoka. It is very easy to talk to him about everything and anything. He has an opinion on almost anything. He has his philosophical approach to life and this makes having conversations with him the more interesting. Boston is a friend one can count on and I know will be friends till dark days.

Mabanda Lweendo Kaonde is a very disciplined and calm person. He loves music and plays several different instruments like the piano, guitar, and ukulele. He does not school pressure to affect his mood. He has a simple and relaxed approach to life, not even exams can make him panic. Whenever I am worried about an assignment or exam I ask myself “what would Mabanda do?” well Mabanda will not panic so I remain calm.

Masiliso Mutumba our very own supermodel and social media celebrity. One thing that I admire the most about Masi is her zeal to always win and how she manages school and her modeling career. Masiliso is a successful model and has a huge media following. She is very business-minded and super talented. She knows exactly what she wants in life and never gives up until she attains it. I have been fortunate to have met her cause I have learned a lot from her.

When I was a kid, I always thought people who wear glasses are extremely intelligent until I started wearing glasses myself. Mwenya Chola does not just have four eyes (because he wears glasses so he is called the four-eyed man) but he is intelligent as well. Amongst all the Zambians, he is the technology man. If anyone one of us wants to buy a laptop or install an application, Mwenya is the man to go to.



I and my friends from Zambia are all studying civil and industrial engineering and we are all in the same group at the university. Apart from being future civil engineers, each friend has a unique attribute that sets them all apart. And every day I interact with these guys, I learn a new thing because they are all just multitalented.

Other than having friends from Zambia, I have met some great students as well from many other African countries like Ghana, Angola, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, and Egypt. I have become friends with a lot of people from other countries but one friend that stands out among all the others is Norbeto Mondlane from Mozambique. He is my best friend in Tyumen because we have similar characters and we aspire for similar things in life. There is an English proverb that says “birds of the same feathers flock together.” I and Norberto are birds of the same feathers and hence we get along very well.



It is no secret that school has had its challenges and problems. The most challenging part of my studies is having to learn in Russian. I have come to appreciate the importance of having friends I can always go to when I have problems with my studies. I was so fortunate to have been put in the same group with students who have brilliant minds and are very helpful. Even though I can only write about a few of my classmates. My classmates from both СТР6-17-9 and ПГС6-17-3 have been wonderful. Here are some friends that cannot go without mention.





Darya Vorfolomeeva is probably one of the most intelligent girls I have ever met. She is committed to her studies and she always strives for excellence. I learned a vital lesson from her early on in my university life which has helped me stay afloat in my studies. I learned that one should always strive to do all school assignments on time. The more you procrastinate or postpone work to a later date the more pressure you put on yourself. I always strive to follow her work ethic and do my assignments in due time. Darya has been helpful in my academics because she is one of the few people that believe in my academic capabilities as an individual.

Grigory Grinchevsky with no doubt has a brilliant brain. He was very helpful during the first year of university when I was just settling into university life. He is more interested in learning than in getting excellent results. They have been so many incidences in which he did not care what grade he got, what mattered was that he understood what had been taught.

Kindness and humbleness define a good person. It is always important to be as kind as you can be to everyone. Ay-Suu Khertek and Katya Stradova are probably the two most kind and modest people I have met at the university. They treat everyone with respect. They are always willing to help anyone who asks for help. They always find time to help regardless of their schedule to attend to people who need their help.

My classmates are great people but apart from classroom interactions, I socialize with a very small number of my classmates. Two of the closest friends that are in my class but still talk to outside class are Sasha Levin and Vladimir Khokhlov. With Sasha it has been easy to be friends because he speaks English, like I said earlier, to understand a language is to understand people. Because Sasha speaks English, it is easier to relate to him. We can watch English movies and later on discuss what we watched. Sasha has invited me and the other Zambia to visit the most beautiful Russian places but unfortunately, our plans always fall through. Well, we finally agreed to go to Saint Petersburg. Vova on the other hand is simply a great guy. He understands that it is difficult for me and my friends to be so far from home and so he is always welcoming. He is the true definition of the Russian spirit. I remember he once told me that if I was having problems with anyone, I should give him a call. He will come, no questions asked.

Grigory Markosian, even though we are not from the same class, has been a great help with school work. We do most school projects together. He is always ready to help whenever I need help.

There was a time I almost lost my two front teeth and no I was not involved in a fight. I was doing one of my favorite things to do, I was playing football. Football is a physical game, so I was pushed badly and fell on my two front teeth. My teeth started hurting badly and I was bleeding. I had to go and see a dentist but well I was short of money. Fortunately, one person who has not just been a friend but more like an elder brother works as a dentist. I met Evigeny Chernoglaz at church and since then he has been a great friend and wise older brother. I called Zhenya and told him I need to see a dentist but unfortunately, he did not specialize in dealing with the problem I had, so his colleagues performed an operation on my teeth. After the operation, I asked him where the cashier was so that I could pay. He looked at me and said “brother, just go home” he had already taken care of the cost for the operation. There is never a dull moment with Zhenya. Whenever Zhenya is available, the atmosphere is always filled with laughter and jokes. He taught me how to play Frisbee.

Away from home, there is a place I can call home, a place where I learned how to cook Russian food. A place that is full of warmth and love. All the Zambians call her mama Vera because she is our Russian mum. Vera Larinova is a kind, hard-working woman whom I met at church. I have known her from the very first year I come to Russia. She loves music and loves to cook. I love to cook as well. We have cooked together such dishes as borsch, pancakes, plov and many others.



Thank you to all the wonderful friends who have turned into family. “If you do not have friends, look for them, if you find them, hold them close” Russian proverb.



## MR POLICEMAN

*The police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.*

*Robert Peel*

I was told to carry my passport everywhere I went but for some reason, I rarely carried my passport with me. I think it is because I was afraid to lose it. But one summer evening, fate decided to teach me and my friends a lesson. It was on Saturday evening when my friends and I decided to go to the Square of Remembrance. The weather was a bit rainy and chilly so we decided to stand around the forever burning fire. My friend had carried a guitar with him and so we started singing some good songs. We had barely sung any songs when we saw a police car pulled up behind us. Two police officers came out of the car and headed towards us. At that time, I did not pay much attention to the officers, as far as I was concerned me and my friends were not doing anything wrong or illegal. One of the police officers requested that we go with him to the police. I was shocked and surprised at his request.

–Why should we follow you to the car?–

One of the residents living near the park felt uncomfortable seeing a group of six dark-skinned men and one Russian friend singing songs around the eternal fire. They decided to call the police. The reason we were given was that the resident felt we were disrespecting one of the most important monuments of the city. For me, it felt like pure racial profiling. I was honestly scared. My entire life, this was the first time I was having an encounter with police officers. I did not know to think or how to act so I just stood there. I worried about been sent back home without getting my degree. I and my friends followed the police officers to their car. They asked for our passports but unfortunately, most of us were not in the habit of carrying our passports.

I was so scared that I started shaking. I had been in Russia barely a year and the idea of me been deported back home because I broke the law did not sit well with me. Different thoughts passed through my mind, maybe I should just run, am a pretty fast runner, maybe the police will not be able to catch me, maybe I should say I do not know the people I was with and that I just come to look at the monument and had not been standing there long enough but before I could think of an escape plan I found myself already standing next to the police car giving them my details. When the police asked us to show them our passports, most of us did not have them. So we were told we had to go to the police station and someone had to go home and take our passports to the station.



I and two of my friends sat in the police car while one police officer and my other friends went to the hostel to get our passports. We had a good conversation with the police officers on our way to the police station. They asked where we were from, how we liked it in Russia, and other usual questions. We were assured nothing bad would happen neither would we be deported.

We arrived at the station and we were taken to a certain room where another police officer wrote down our details.

“Stand here. Let me measure your height”, the police officer instructed, and then he took out his digital camera.

I thought to myself this seems like a scene from those criminal movies I watch.

“Stand in front of that white cloth please!”, the police officer continued. Then the camera flashes and makes that click sound and then it clicks in my mind. I am in the data system of the Russian police. My mother would be shocked.

“Turn to your left, now to your right”, the police officer instructed.

Finally, they took our fingerprints and we were let go. After I got home, I took a deep breath and promised myself to always carry my passport.

Almost a year after my first encounter with the police, I was sited in a police car but this time it was not because I had forgotten to carry my passport or because I was trespassing. It was my second summer in Russia and it was the second time I was getting stopped by the police. It all happened on a lovely Saturday evening. I had just finished playing soccer with my friends. The weather was warm and nice so I decided to walk home from Gilevskaya Roshcha. I was stopped near Tyumen Drama Theater by a young police officer probably in his early twenties. He asked me to show him any form of identification. I showed him my student card. Then he told me to go with him to the mini police station that was just near where I was stopped. He said that he had to confirm my documents with his supervisor. When we arrived at the police station, he handed my student card to his supervisor. The supervisor then started writing my details in a certain book. The young man who had brought me to the police station looked at me at confirmed with his supervisor that I was of medium height and I looked like I was in my early twenties. It was like in the movies when the police confirm how a suspect look. I was asked to take a seat and wait.

Twenty minutes went by and they did not tell me anything neither did they want to give me my student card. I could no longer wait without knowing why I was being kept there if they could not even tell what I was doing there in the first place.

–What am I still doing here? kindly tell me if I have done something wrong because it has been 20 minutes and you haven’t told me anything but

instead you are just keeping me here,—I asked the supervisor. The woman did not answer, instead, she told me to just wait and she continued writing. As I sat waiting, I saw a paper on the table near me. I picked up the paper to read. It turned out the paper had information about people wanted by the police. What caught my attention was a picture of two black people. The picture was unclear. As I was reading, I realized that the two black people were wanted by the police because they had stolen a phone in a certain supermall. It so happens that the description of one the these two was similar to mine. Middle-aged African, medium height, long black hair, brown eyes, wearing a black coat. At this moment I understood why I was being held at the station.

After I had waited for almost two hours, a police car came to pick me up to take me to the main police station. As I sat in the car I realized I was entering a police car for the second time. I arrived at the main police station and I was asked to sit in a certain room where my details were written down. I was nervous, I could hear how my heart was beating, even though it was cold, I was sweating. I knew I was innocent but just the thought of being at the police station was scary.

After my details had been written down, I was taken to the second floor where the interrogation room was. When I entered the interrogation room, I met a very friendly police officer who told me not to worry. I was told to sit down. The police officer was very kind, he asked me to explain what had happened, why had been picked up by the police in the first place. I told him how I was randomly stopped by the police, with no explanation for why I was stopped and how I was made to wait for more than two hours. He recorded my statement and told me to sign so that he would let me go. It turned out that the person who looked similar to me was a girl. The first police station I went to had a photocopy of the original picture so it was not clear to determine the exact features of the person. Even though me and the person had similar general physical features like height and age, we looked completely different, including the shape of the nose, skin color, and eyebrows. After a long day at the police station, I finally went home with my friends who had come to pick me up. To this day that experience has been one of the worst I have ever had. Experiencing anxiety, the worry, the uncertainty of not knowing what happens next, not knowing what to do or whom to call because you are so far from home.

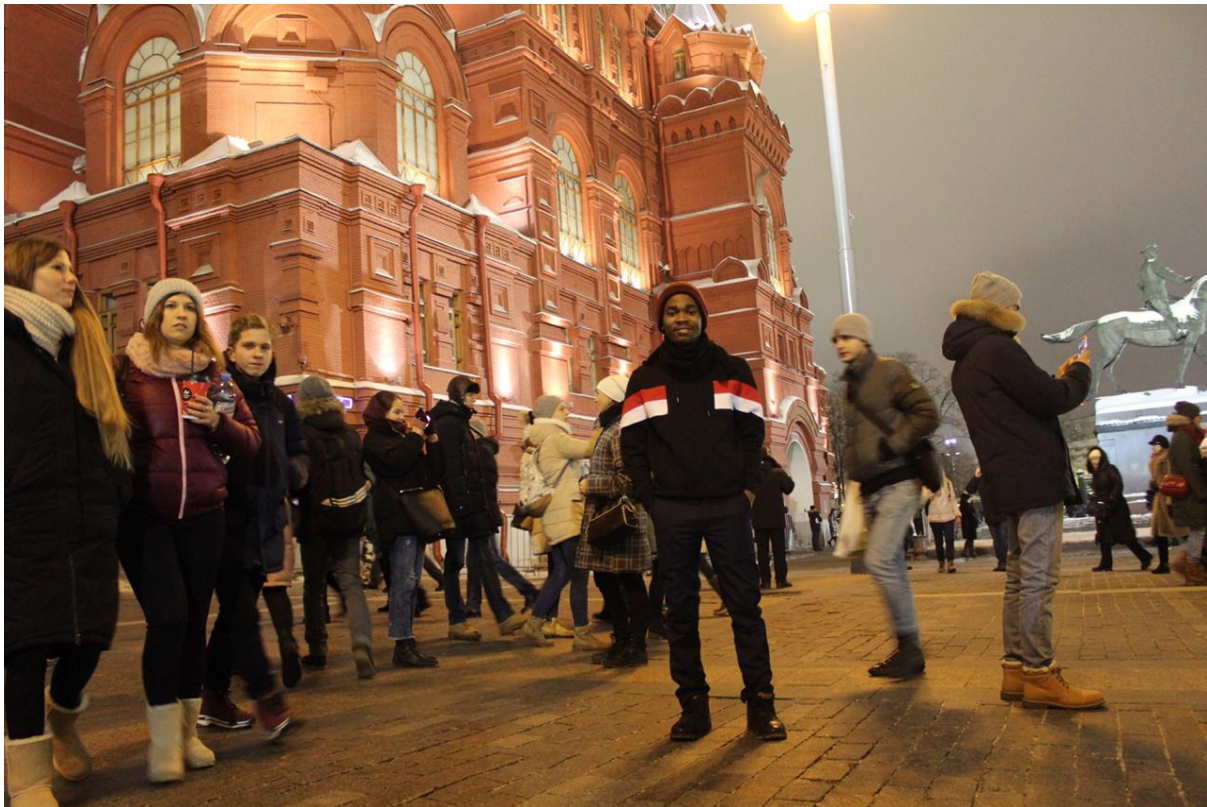
## AT THE END OF IT ALL

*In the end, the most important thing is to live  
an unforgettable and happy life*

The years I have spent in Russia have been a mixture of different emotions. I learned so much about myself and about who I want to become. I made friends with whom I made memories. These memories will forever remain engraved in my heart. I fell in love with Tyumen and its people. I learned the Russian language and Russian culture. I fell in love with the food and the snow except the cold.

While in Russia I have had the opportunity to visit other Russian cities. I have been to Moscow where I went to visit and see the city then I went to camp. I traveled to Tomsk and Omsk then I went sky diving in

Yalutorovsk. I have been to Ishim and Yekaterinburg. Living in Russia would not be complete without seeing Saint Petersburg so I also traveled to Petersburg to see its beauty. I would love to visit Baikal and Sochi.



I have not gone back home for four years now and I do greatly miss my family but because I have been surrounded by wonderful people which has helped in coping with the stress of not been home. Tyumen has easily turned into my second home and I love it here.



In conclusion, I am very thankful for this opportunity that was given to me to experience something completely new. Something different from what I grew up with. Living and studying Russia allowed me to see the world through the eyes of another culture. It allowed me to realize that not all the stereotypes that the world knows about Russia are true. Now I have a different story to tell.

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**Khondiwa Danny**

# **DEEP BLUE SEA**

*LIFE STORIES  
OF AN AFRICAN STUDENT IN RUSSIA*

*В авторской редакции*

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