

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

On behalf of ExSSA USA DC Metro, we welcome you, our patriarchs, the foundation of our household and leaders of our communities, to our First Father's Day Celebration!!

50 years ago, a few missionaries saw the need to build a boarding school to educate and provide spiritual leadership for young girls in Cameroon. They would name that school Saker Baptist College. Fifty years ago, life in Limbe, then Victoria, was not as appealing as it is today. I imagine wild tropical forests, mosquitos, puddled roads, snakes, malaria, poor drinking water, and a total lack of luxury. I wonder what thoughts crossed the minds of these young men and women on Mission to Cameroon. I can only imagine that they were focused on building a school, training young girls, and providing them with a first –class education, the type that has catapulted us, these beautiful ladies in fuschia around you, and many more to success. Fifty years ago, the Cameroonian woman had been relegated to farm work, or household chores, or betrothed in return for a handsome bride price. So you understand the odds these first missionaries were up against.

The resources for building a school were very limited, but the dreams and determination were in abundance. A few young women from North America braved the odds to mold a breed of women that society cherishes.

These missionaries can hardly believe themselves what a faint dream has yielded: hundreds of women excelling in both professional and personal pursuits; women who not only build families, but educate and support communities.

Dear fathers, brothers, mentors and celebrated men and women of our community. A dream is a start, yet can be elusive if you let the wind blow it off your mind. A dream has changed the course of history, improved lives and provided much help to the underprivileged, while yielding much satisfaction to the dreamer.

A dreamer like Oprah read news stories of black girls in South Africa, girls who had been relegated to success on their backs. She braved the odds and decided to prove the world wrong by dedicating resources to build a school that would nurture and train girls to be more than women who knew only how to wage the trump card between their legs for material goods. You know Oprah's world was tested with news headlines, her intentions questioned. Yet her resolve was unwavering. So you can understand why a tearful Oprah delivering a speech at the graduation of the first class stated, and I quote in part "The pride that I feel today is overpowering....I have been on a mission my whole life to be able to give back what I have been given..... today I am fulfilling that mission."... "[w]hen you invest in the leadership of girls you invest in a nation," said Oprah. "Every one of these girls is going to serve themselves, their family, community and country in ways that are yet to amaze you."

You may argue that Oprah has money, but it had to take a caring heart, a dreamer, and determination to overcome challenges and find success in a grim picture. And you know the tears were tears of joy; the joy that she had indeed brought hope to impoverished girls.

William Kamkwamba, the young Malawian who, in the heart of the worst famine in Malawi, dreamt of a windmill that would eventually produce electricity for his village. William was only 14 when he dreamt. He had dropped out of school because his family could barely afford food or basic necessities. Yet this 14 year old, who could have disregarded every moral code to scam his fellow villagers did not give up a dream. He helped his father on the farm, while building this rudimentary windmill. Eventually, his invention saved his village from the worst famine, generated power throughout his community and today William, the school drop out travels the world sharing his story of perseverance, curiosity, and ingenuity in the memoir *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope*. William gave hope where there was none. William persevered through hard ship and days of starvation. William had no money, yet he changed lives.

Derrick Kayongo, a Ugandan, can tell you about life as a refugee. He transitioned from the tough life of a refugee to become a college graduate, a U.S. citizen and a field coordinator for CARE International. But he did forget his roots or the fact that many refugees in Africa continue to lack access to basic sanitation. Derrick dreamt of recycling soap disposed by hotels to help refugee families he had left behind. He immediately saw how wasted resources could be hugely beneficial to people, living far from home with very limited resources. He dreamt of delivering soap so that income could be channeled to other pertinent needs. Derrick started his dream from his living room. Derrick today runs the global soap project and is a humble recipient of the CNN hero award.

These are stories of people like you and I, people who dreamt, people who were selfless, people who were determined to make a difference in the world, sometimes with nothing. You too can dream; You too can make a difference.

You can make a difference if only you reach within and summon goodwill.

You can make a difference if you care for more than your immediate family and friends

You make a difference if you direct your energy and resources to building broken lives and creating oasis for those in deserts of despair.

You can make a difference if you count your riches not by material goods, but by lives impacted through positive action.

You can make a difference if you set status aside and dwell more on humbleness.

You can make a difference if you look more to the benefit of your action not the financial rewards.

Like the missionaries, Oprah, Derrick, and William you can make a difference through ordinary actions.

The difference is recognizing that schooling, vocational training, opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, access to healthcare and to Information and Communication Technologies can change, and indeed save the lives of girls and women, while positively transforming their families and communities.

The difference is recognizing that lacking alternatives, many uneducated girls are drawn into prostitution, putting them at a far greater risk of contracting HIV--a widely overlooked problem with gravely devastating consequences.

The difference is taking positive steps toward creating a healthy environment for educating children, not ignoring dilapidated buildings infected with fungus and all types of bacterial that generate long-term health conditions for our girls in boarding schools.

The difference is you, the responsible global citizen who travels the world spotting opportunities that can change lives and give those less fortunate an equal chance of success and happiness.

Today will test our resolve as concerned citizens, as dreamers; We, EX-Sakerettes dream of the day when a young girl can spot opportunity and transform that opportunity to economic benefit.

We dream of schools with spotless refectories, state of the art kitchens. We dream of providing girls with tools that allow for innovation and entrepreneurship when faced they are faced with limitations. Do you share this dream?

Today let's recognize that every minute spent doing nothing, one hundred girls are leaving Cameroon disguised as babysitters or apple pickers. You know that they will never pick apples or babysit. These are tomorrow's mothers, forced today by economic hardship into indecency. They will end up in brothels confined to slave labor until they lose their identity or commit suicide. Also, recognize that for each un-empowered woman, there's a child learning the ropes of scamming and terrifying our communities. Let's test our resolve to empower these women to maximize their potential and live their dreams. Let's all get on the boat and set sail to the depths of oceans of knowledge and giving. On this journey, we recognize that no one captain knows how to maneuver the ocean currents. Therefore, we will clasp hands, and hold on to each other when the winds rock our boat. This is a difficult journey, but we can make it if we all dream

of bringing to the girls on the shores of desperation, the pearls that enable them start life as responsible citizens looking out for themselves and for posterity.
It's important that we all band together, think of an idea and pursue it. Invest in a girl, invest in a nation; Make a difference today!