



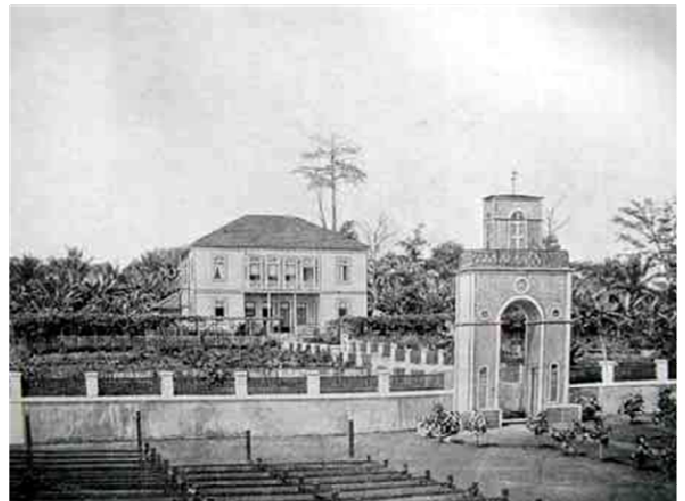
Let me tell you about my life...

I was born in S. Tome and Principe, Agua Grande district, Central Hospital Aires Menezes.

My four brothers were all older than me and the one that was living with me was 18 years older than me.

When I began to discover the world, I remember I was a healthy child and a very dear one. This is because the midwife advised y parents I must be their last child. My parents were poor, but at that time, even in the colonial era, there was no lack of food. The money was not enough for many clothes and toys. I always cried every night and could not explain what I had. My parents, all anxious, no longer knew what they had to do. It was awesome, because during the day I was always well.

We lived on the farm Claudino Farro, where my parents worked, far from the city. The road was not asphalted nor parallel: only rutted dirt. There was also a line of railway. Only two kinds of transport arrived at that place: a tractor and the machinery that pulled the wagons. During the week this tractor collected cocoa and other



agricultural products in the most difficult places to fill the wagons. We had to be retained on the farm all the week, because the tractor went there on Monday and returned on Saturdays.

To go out there we usually had to travel about a twelve hours' journey.

My daily routine was a very simple one. I got up at 6 am in the morning, took my breakfast at 7 and went to school that ended at noon. After lunch, used to play with a car made of wire and



wooden wheels. Sometimes, I swam in the river, enjoying a good bath and even caught some shrimp. I loved to feel that smell of fresh air, that green and virgin landscape. We had a small garden on the edge of the house, where we planted a little of everything for our daily meals. Typically, I went to bed nearly the 19 pm. In that farm there was a collective laundry.

The pond to fetch water and wash the dishes was also collective. The bathroom was public, and there was a canteen for the workers. Tropical fruits were all very tasty, but I liked the jackfruit.

As for food, calulu was the meal I most enjoy. So tasty! I remember the smell in the kitchen and me asking my mother to have a little taste before going to table. She always scolded me but at last opened the pot and gave me a little bit on a wooden spoon.



My father was the foreman in this cocoa farm, but there was also coffee, bananas and bush. He dressed as a military from

head to toe. With a machete and a hook (sickle with a long shaft) in hands, he constantly measured and oversaw the work in the bush. My mother was a simple worker in the bush.



There was no doctor or hospital in the farm, but only a first aid station. So, my father decided that my mother and I must go living in town, but there was a problem: there, we had no home. My grandmother, that was living there, lived in a small wooden house with a bedroom and a kitchen.

The money my parents earned was only enough to supply for our food, and with my father working only it would be worse. Then, my father took the initiative to construct personally a room for me and my mother, made of raw wood on the hard ground.

Finally, my mother went to live with me in town. On one hand, there was a good thing happening in this trip to the city. The doctor discovered that what made me cry at night was a toothache. But, on the other hand, I lived badly, because the house had no conditions. When it rained, water flooded the whole room, it was just mud in the house. To earn some money, my mother had to sell field products in the city. My father continued



to work on the farm during the week and on Saturday came and brought us the products for my mother to sell during the week.

These were our living conditions until I was six years. That's when I returned to the farm to live with my father and let my mother in the city. The few money my father saved allowed him to start building a very modest house with reasonable conditions. Back in the farm, with seven years old, I started going to school.

By this time, I started to ask for things that, at the time, my parents could not afford to buy me: a tricycle, a bicycle, good toys. Even today I can remember the joy I felt when my brother made



my first scooter from mulberry wood and bearings. These bearings were from old and damage cars. What other toys had I? I remember cars and kites made of sardine cans. Never frequent a kindergarden, never went to pre-school. That's why I have so much difficult in school. The build was simply just a small classroom with only a

teacher. He taught everything to everyone: the preschool, first, second, third and fourth grades.

Although small, the school did fit the students from the neighboring farms. The classroom had no more than two rows of seats. The timetable was divided in two shifts: from seven to twelve the kindergarten and first grade students occupied a row and the third grade ones sat on the other. Second and fourth classes were attended in the afternoon. There were also two tables, one for each row. Learning was very hard! I had no one to



teach me at home and therefore failed the first and second classes. The education system was a real massacre. If we had any questions to ask, soon thwack fell. There was such a great silence during class! Only those to whom the teacher asked questions were allowed to speak. There was such a few time for so many students. Where I passed the second grade, my father sent me to study another school in the farm where my older brother was working. It was a much better place for there were two teachers and better conditions. But it was a vain effort as I did not like the farm and wanted to come back to my father.

At that time, I began to understand that happiness has nothing to do with money or comfort. My brother lived in a house that had many bedrooms, two bathrooms, kitchen, balcony and a huge room, still had a servant, but despite all this, I prefer to live with my father who had only four chairs, a table and a bed for us both in a single room. Then I made the fourth grade. It was the limit of education in the fields. After six years studying on the farm I had to return to my mother in the city. I was thirteen by then. There, I frequented the prep school Patrice Lumumba



studying in the fifth year. In the meanwhile, the house that my parents were building was completed.

In the city, the pleasant smell, the whistling of birds and the absolute peace ended. Instead, there was sea smell, a lot of noise made by the cars and much confusion. The atmosphere was totally

different and at school colleagues expressed themselves better and teachers also taught better.

But there was one obstacle. My house was five kilometers away from school and I had to ride about ten miles a day, had to walk all that way every day. During the journey I used to watch other things that I always had a curiosity to see up close. I started to enjoy the sea and make new friends. And it was then that I fell in love with auto mechanics systems. On the road, the way to school, I often found damaged cars, sometimes simply with a wire reel off. The technician arrived, connected the wire, and there was the car running! At that time, for me, a mechanic was likened to a scientist. Mechanics were the most intelligent men in the world. On the way home I usually enjoyed to stop in the engineering shops to wonder how they managed to assemble an engine, with all those parts, screws, nuts and washers, each one in its respective place, and nothing left! After



some operations the engine worked. What a show! Then I had the idea to leave the normal school to study mechanical engineering in the Polytechnic. I asked the possibility of requesting registration, but they told me that the minimum allowable was the 6th grade. As I really wanted to enter the Polytechnic school I unburdened with my father, saying that I would commit myself to complete the 6th. But he thought it would be a hasty decision. Instead, he wanted me to study in mainstream school and conclude the 11th year, which was then the maximum schooling in S. Tome and Principe. My father was expecting me to be an agronomist and a director of a livestock enterprise. Sure, it was in the branch on which he worked. He gave me as an example, my brother. My father said: «- Your brother, Feliciano Neto, took a degree as a phytosanitary. He's like a garden boss, has transportation and fuel, good salary and perks, all paid by the Government. I want you to be an engineer or a manager, because it is always better than mechanic, dirty oil and grease.» This way, I was encouraged to go on studying, but always with the idea of being a mechanic, because I would be the smartest man in the world. So, my curiosity about mechanics went going on. I learned to ride a motorcycle and to drive a car behind the backs of my parents. At that time I was about 14 years old.

My mother was a marketer, went out in the morning and only returned at night. Therefore, it was up to me some chores such as sweeping and cleaning the house, sweep the yard, washing dishes and pans, bed making, cooking, washing and even ironing. Thanks to these demands, today I can properly do all those things.

As my mother sacrificed herself too much to load the fields products from our house to the market, I



decided to make a wheelbarrow with wood just to help her. It had wooden wheels and coated tire coated, the shaft was done with a piece of steel rod. With that little car, I took the products



to the market before going to school. By nightfall, I collected all the products that were not sold and led them to keep at home because the market was outdoors and there was no place to save them.

At the time, I remember that my classmates mocked me. They said I was doing the work that

belonged to the women. Therefore, I had such a little time to play the ball! But I didn't mind to these jokes, because I knew what I wanted and the bad conditions in which our family had to be living.

However, as in S. Tomé e Príncipe the school schedule was divided into two periods (morning from 07:00 to 12:00 and afternoon from 13:30 to 18:00) and each class occupied only one of them, when I went to the 7th year in the normal school, it happened to be in the afternoon. So, I enrolled myself at the Polytechnic Center, enjoying the morning to go studying at the Polytechnic and the afternoon to go to the normal school. I started to have less time for housework and only did some home tasks on the week-ends. I manage this type of life for a long time!

So, when I got to 9th grade in regular school, I already was coursing the third year of the Polytechnic and at that level already understand the mechanics. It was time to do some small jobs on weekends, managing to win some money. Cars and motorcycles that I

repaired, often served to transport me to school. I was always running away from 'Stop



Operation', because I was driving without a license. At that time, I was only seventeen years old, but as I've always been tall and thin, everybody thought I was a man. As I completed the 9th grade, I finished the course in Auto Mechanics, which had lasted three years. I then decided to stop studying and started looking for a job. On the one hand, my parents were upset because they did not want me to leave school, but on the other hand, were pleased with my courage to finish the course.

After a year I began working on a German construction company that was the largest construction company in S. Tomé. I worked as a mechanic, doing repairs and maintenance of machines. In the present, I am living in Vila Nova de Famalicão (Portugal), where I practice the profession of mechanical and complete my training with a technical course in High School D. Sancho I.

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