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By Kevin Mwachiro



Dear Geoffrey,

Your family picked a great photo of you that was used at your funeral. You were photogenic and I was impressed by how comfortable you were in front of the camera. It was a good shot and I remember, saying to myself, 'cool kid'. Your dad, Peter said that photo was taken on just a *kawa* day. An ordinary day in the sprawling, high-density, sprawling neighbourhood of Pipeline.

My name is Kevin. A *mwananchi* just like you but one who was touched by your death on the day of President Uhuru Kenyatta's inauguration. When I first heard the news that another kid had been shot, I must admit I was numbed. There was lots of anger, confusion and despair hurricaning inside me. I refused to go online to read what had happened and it took me a day to muster the strength to read about the events that led to your death. I did and didn't want to know.

I was like, another child? Have we stooped that low as a nation that our brutality and hatred does not even spare children during our fights? Something is wrong with us big people!!! You were only seven. Seven, my boy. I remember I liked being seven. It seemed like such a cool age. Unfortunately, you only got to know seven. It ended there for you and your legacy began. You will be remembered as the kid who was shot on inauguration day. Your family will remember you and you will be remembered for the injustice that your family will receive. Your family like the rest of Kenya will have to accept and move on. *Wenye nchi* would much rather prefer that. Our national rallying call

should be, *'Harambee, Accept and Move, Harambee, Accept and Move On!'*

It is sad that our nation-building, Kenya -rising, fix the economy and peace mantras, will be built on the graves of individuals like you. The year, 2017, joins 2007, 1997 and 1992 as years scarred by PEV (Post Election Violence) and the death of innocents. People are scared to use that acronym these days. Maybe it helps us forget, and hide behind that accept and move on attitude that we as a nation have taken to heart. PEV for me is politically engineered violence. It has been in our past, post and present. It has become the reality of our democracy. The reality of Kenya, a country that is now uncomfortable with itself and fearful and untrusting of its children.

I was seven too, Geoffrey and I remember it was in 1980. My first recollection of the Olympic games was in that year, the games were in the USSR, now called Russia. President Moi, had been in power for two years. I had just joined Standard One or Class One, as it is referred to now. The thing I liked most about being in Standard One was, that I was finally able to join my brother in the same school. You see, I had been in another school and didn't like it much. But that year, we were together with my big brother. Was it like that for you? Did you like being with your big sister in the same school?

You seem cheeky, Geoffrey? The description of you in the press barely scratched the surface. *"He was a good boy, mtoto mzuri."* That is all. There was no story built around you, to tell us who you were. There was no interest in what you liked, what your teachers and classmates at Remedy Academy and your new school Uvania Primary thought of you? What did the relatives think of you? What was your home in Mwala like? Where in Machakos County is Mwala? It was reported that you were playing on the balcony? Why were you alone? Didn't you have other kids to play with?

I remember my younger brother, for many years was his own best company. He would get a couple of pens or pencils and conjure up images and stories in his mind that only he would enjoy. Was that you too? When I was seven, I was a soft and almost gentle. I make myself sound like an advert for Sta Soft! But I was seven too. I drank *maziwa ya nyayo* (President Moi's free milk) and VOK (Voice of Kenya) were our eyes and ears to the world. We only had one TV station/channel then and would you believe it, in black and white. I remember loving Fanta, like crazy! The Treetop bottles weren't big enough; the *Weekly Review* had too many words and hardly any pictures. I devoured *Rainbow*, a children's magazine, hated avocado and worshipped our loquat tree in August.

My best friend David Gitau who swam in the baby pool, was terrified of a teacher called Ms Kilonzo and Simba and Bingo were our dogs' names. I had my biggest birthday party when I was seven. It was awesome! I remember the cake had nice chocolate icing. We used to get homework only on Fridays and the big rubbish truck used to collect our *taka taka* fascinated me. Yes, back then Nairobi City Council did that. Ah, and Oven-door Bakery in my head was heaven. That was part of my seven.

He was only seven, I repeated that statement over and over in my head. Seven. Snuffed out at seven. Did you hear the *piki piki* that is said to have the guys who shot you? Did the bullet tear through the washing lines towards you? Was your bullet the first one that rung out or did you fall after the pregnant lady got shot in the thigh?

By the way, Mama Mtoto, as your dad called her is fine. Her name is Agnes and she gave birth to a baby girl. The media just described her as a pregnant woman. I kept on wondering why? She was a victim too, right? Doesn't she deserve to be named? I was told I ask too many questions. But, how else will we know the truth?

I saw pictures of your mother distraught. The media exposing her grief. It is sad that our appetite for news does not let one mourn in private. Maureen, your sister seemed stunned to silence. Your dad Peter's one roomed flat became Pipeline's Ground Zero. Mourners, onlookers, journalists and cops

descended on the tiny balcony that was once your city home. We had landed like vultures onto your home. We wanted to know why another child was killed so soon. Why? Who donnit? The police denied it was them, but who believes the police these days? Who else has bullets, batons and boots that speak with authority? The memories of Baby Pendo and Stephanie Moraa were still fresh in our hearts. Then they killed you Geoffrey! No one has been brought to book and frankly; we don't expect anyone to be charged with your murder. This is Kenya, sadly. Two five four at fifty-four! Where our wounds are left open for time to heal. Don't even ask about justice. Haki, if I knew I'd tell you.

In a few months, Kenya will forget you that you were only seven. But your family won't. They have to live with the pain and our anger we will eventually turn to numbness, as we can't wait to put 2017 behind us. There will be no commission of inquiry to investigate why yet again another Kenyan election claimed the lives of very very young, youthful, some pregnant and some 'peace-loving' Kenyans.

We will not stop to question whether it is right for stones to battle with bullets. It will all be forgotten, if not all forgotten already. Would you believe Geoffrey, there is already talk of 2022 without even fixing the problems of this and other elections? Anyway, it's easier to fall on the comfort of our 'unsaid rallying call', '*Harambee! Accept and move on!*'

But we forget it will not be easy for your mum. She will miss your appetite for rice and cabbage, watermelon and oranges and smile at the way you hated pineapple. She says you were a critic in the kitchen and spoke your mind on the meals she prepared. I can see you were a foodie in the making. She will miss your, '*Mum, hiyo haifai,*' comments. She laughed as she told me about that, but that laugh tugged at her heart, rekindled her pain and opened the emptiness that has now replaced you in your home.

You are missed, Geoffrey. Maureen will reminisce sitting with you on the sofa and giggling at the Kirikou cartoons that you loved. You dad, remembers your gentleness, your love for cycling, football and play. The same play that came in the way of a stray bullet. Your folks remember that despite the difficult pregnancy, you came out a bouncing baby boy weighing 4kgs and were a most pleasant and easy child.

You were only seven, Geoff and on your way to Class Three next year at your new school, Uvaini Primary School in Machakos. You had just completed your first term there. Maths and Kiswahili classes that were your favourite, will be no more for you.

You've left us here as we are still trying to understand where we are as a nation. Fortunately, you won't be subjected to tribal profiling that is now prevalent. The other day, I was asked whether I was Kikuyu or Luo, it seems like they have become euphemisms for government and opposition. If that isn't enough, then your surname determines how you will be welcomed, celebrated or mourned. This saddens me. That's what you've left behind.

It also saddens me how bereft (forgive the big word) of kindness we are becoming even in death. I'm sorry to tell you that your body spent hours covered by a leso outside your home before it was taken to City Mortuary in the dead of the night. Your blood staining the same floor that you were playing on earlier. Those images of your corpse is how you were introduced to Kenya. The police had to be begged to take your body to the morgue and your family was reduced to cleaning the blood stains off the police car that ferried you there. Of course, *kitu kidogo* was also demanded off your family. To the officers present your death was an opportunity to oil their palms. This is our Kenya. We are the *watumishi* not the cops. Even dignity was denied to your family at this time.

Your dad is a strong man, like Pendo's dad and like him; he also experienced the lack of kindness

from the system. He mentioned that he was unable to be in the room with the police when they began the post mortem examinations. It was too much for him. He walked out. I don't see why he even had to be there in the first place, when all this was so raw. Maybe, he didn't want to live you alone.

Rest, Geoffrey. Your family did what they could to make sure that you had a good send off, but unfortunately your burial became another rally. Politicians couldn't resist their pride, politicking, and pawing your death. They ignored sympathy and empathy as they used your grave as a podium for their agenda. If you were shot on the streets, maybe you'd have been described as a looter. You are lucky you didn't get to see this charade. Even the media, managed to weave in politics into your funeral. Lots of politics. Sadly, that funeral was neither about you nor your family. There was an image of your father shielding his face with his *kofia* that made me wonder. Was he using his hat to protect his eye or hide his tears? He will miss you Geoffrey. They all will.

Rest, little boy. Keep watch over your family and when you can Kenya too. I hope that's not too much to ask? Maybe in heaven they have a special place for children who are only seven.

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