

From: Jacob Atanga

To: Tom Heebink

Sent: Monday, October 08, 2007 12:10 AM

Subject: I shall forever be indebted to you

Hi, Tom. I should have written first, but I found it extremely hard to compose myself after my call you this morning. If happiness, joy and emotions could make humans fly, I could have flown to the moon this morning when I was able to make contact with you by phone after 36 years. I was choked with emotion and joy. I had prayed over the years that I be able to make contact and express my gratitude to you for your kindness and goodness before I depart this earth. I searched for you over the years, but could never make the right contact. Last night, without any plans on making a search, an ad came up on the web as I was about to get into my email, stating "you can find anyone's email address." I was not interested in finding anyone's email address, but something said to me to try looking up your address. As I did, what I could not find all these years suddenly popped up, and it was also the only address.

I can never forget the day or your name. It was September 10, 1971, and I was teenager on the TWA flight from London, where I had connected on a flight from Ghana, to New York, on my way to Wisconsin State University, La Cross. As the plane was about to land, from nowhere you walked up to me and asked, "Where are you heading to?" I replied Wisconsin State University, La Crosse". You then enquired if I had a flight to get there, and my response was that I had \$33.00 cash on me, and that I would use that to get a bus to La Crosse. You then stated that it was a long way from New York. When the plane landed at JFK, you took me to an office and made some calls to the University at La Crosse and informed them that I had only \$33.00 in my pocket and no ticket to get to La Crosse. After some time you succeeded in getting the Foreign Student office to agree to advance me money for a ticket to La Crosse.

I arrived safely at La Crosse, thanks to you, my guardian angel. Tom, you were my first American contact, and what you did for me that day stayed with me always and was pivotal in the way I appreciate this country as well as my continued desire to reach out to people in my daily life. I was at La Crosse for a year, but attended classes for only one semester. Though I had no money for the other semester, the school allowed me to stay in the dorm without attending classes until I could come up with funds. The school could have had me deported, but it showed my kindness and patience, for other students who did not have the funds to register for classes were sent back to their countries. By the grace of God, I was made an exception.

Having no chance for money to attend school, (though I had an academic scholarship, it was not easy finding funds then to pay for my room and board, and I was not allowed to work, being a foreign student on a visa), I left La Crosse for Chicago, where I quickly found a job at the Schwinn Bicycle Manufacturing plant and also registered in college. I attended school for a year and did not register after that because I had to work and use my savings to pay tuition for my younger brother who had gained admission to the same school I had attended. Though I was an 'A' student, scholarships for foreign students were often about a quarter of the cost of tuition. I worked and paid for my brother's tuition in full, and after one year he transferred to Ball State University. My younger brother went on to obtain graduate degrees in math and chemistry, and for the past 15 years has been the dean of sciences at one of the universities in California.

I eventually went back to school and obtained my undergrad and graduate degrees, and worked for three years at Borg Warner as an industrial engineer, and in 1987 I quit my job to attend law school at Indiana University. I also served as a JAQ officer in the US Army Reserves, and retired as a Captain from the Reserves in 2004 after 20 years of service. I passed all the tests and requirements to be

promoted to Major, but chose to retire before I could be promoted. I worked with Steve Buyer when he was a Captain and I was a First Lieutenant. He decided to run for Congress after the first Gulf War, and he is still in Congress. I've been asked by many here to run for Congress or Mayor, but I have to decide some time soon if I should do so or return to Ghana to seek office, so that I be of some help. I have been in private law practice in Indianapolis, Indiana since 1990.

I was married while I was in Chicago, and eventually divorced in 1990. A daughter was born of the marriage, and I had custody of her since our separation when she was 5 years old and after the divorce. She is now in her late twenties and living in London, England. I have not yet remarried, for my life has constantly been devoted to working for people almost 14 to 16 hours daily. After much prodding, I have begun to work less and hopefully can take care of myself too. But I can never walk away from doing things for others. What you did for me on September 10, 1971 became a burning light in me to reach out always and touch others. I am very proud and honored to say that the very first contact I had upon entering America was you, and it was positive and mystical, and I carry that experience with me daily. Because of what you did for me, my life went on to reach countless others.

An example of your influence on me is a case I took pro bono in 1991 when no one would take the case, and we ended up being given one hour on the Sally Jesse Raphael show in 1991. Governor (now Senator) Bayh could not be on the program but had his chief counsel appear on the show in his place. The woman was sentenced in 1991 to 10 years for hitting a nurse with a sandal while she was in juvenile detention as a truant. After 10 months in the women's prison, she escaped with two others. The two were apprehended within two years and given extra prison time. My client was gone for 10 years before she was finally apprehended when her brakes lights went bad and she could produce no identification or license. After many months of working on her behalf, she won her freedom. There were calls from all over the country to advance money for her defense, but I refused to accept any money. What Mr. Heebink did for me on September 10, 1971 taught me that helping a stranger without asking for anything in return is more rewarding and produces more fruits for many. I would never have been complete without reaching you or your family to say thank you from the bottom of my heart and soul.

I am proud to say that my experience at the University of La Crosse, Wisconsin has been the best I have had at any university, even though I did not complete my studies there, and it is the only university I intend to leave whatever little I have to show my sincere gratitude. I am more fond of the University of Wisconsin than any other institution, and I always consider it as part of my family. I will stop here for now, for my story is long and never told until today, and I thank God for you, Tom. The hand of God guided you to me on that day of my arrival in the US, and you, without being asked, reached out and helped me, a total stranger. That kind deed of yours has not been forgotten or taken for granted. Thank you so very much, and may God continue to protect you and grant you happiness and good health. Our guardian angels are humans among fellow humans, and I am a true example of how that works. It takes a very special person to be touched by God to a guardian angel to another human, and that you truly are. I shall continue with my story when I write again. God bless, and good night.

Jacob Atanga