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GRADUATION | Past life of crime now behind man as he completes degree course

Former convict savours glory

Bena joined college to study engineering but crime landed him in prison. Here is the story of his second chance BY NJOKI CHEGE @njokichege nchege@ke.nationmedia.com

s the 51st graduation ceremony A was underway at the University of Nairobi yesterday, 36-year-old Bernard Ouma Omondi, or Bena, was beaming with joy at the second chance that life had handed him.

He left Kamiti Maximum Prison four years ago and returned to uni-

versity after seven years to pursue his dream of higher education. The sad chapter of his life began in 1998 when he first joined the Univer-sity of Nairobi to pursue a Bachelor

sity of Nairobi to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental and Biosystems Engineering. After trying his hand in side-hustles such as hawking second-hand clothes to female students, greed got the bet-ter of him and he joined a gang of robbers. "I met a friend who intro-duced me to his friends, who were armed robbers. They wanted me to store their firearms in my university hostel room for a fee," he recalls. An informant told on Bena, a fourth

year student, and his gang and before he knew it, he was a wanted criminal. The student-turned-fugitive attempted to escape to Lokichogio, but he was arrested in Kitale.

In 2003, he was charged with 24 accounts of murder, rape and rob-

CHRONOLOGY Student spent six vears behind bars 1998: Bernard joined the Uni-

versity of Nairobi to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental and Biosystems Engineering.

2003: He was arrested and sentenced to six years in prison for robbery with violence, murder and rape.

2009: He was released from prison

2011: He was re-admitted to the university.

bery. At 25, Bena's life on the fast lane came to a grinding halt and he would cool off his heels in a prison cell for six years.

Life in prison was hell, he says. was in shock at first. I never thought I would survive." Soon, he adapted and took "a long hard look" at his life. "I decided what I wanted to do with my life after prison.'

He was released in 2009 and he sought readmission to the university.



RURI I NATION IENNIEER MU

Bernard Ouma after he graduated with an engineering degree at the University of Nairobi yesterday. As a student, he had been convicted of robbery and jailed.

Adjusting to normal life after years in prison was not easy. Bena says he went underground and lived in Kisumu for one year, where he sold fresh juice and fruits.

"Ex-convicts were being hunted down and killed. There was a Mungiki crackdown and I felt that my life was in danger, but that did not stop me from following up on my re-admission to the university." In 2011, he was readmitted and he

started from where he had left off. "At first, I felt out of place, being in class with students who were much younger than me. I never interacted with them beyond academic work,

but by the time of graduation, I had adjusted and most of my classmates

are now my friends." Bena says he had to face the uni-versity's disciplinary committee and the senate to plead his case before he was re-admitted. His lecturers, some of whom knew his situation, treated him well. "They realised I was an older student, but they treated me equal to the other students." Now a father of two and a univer-

sity graduate, Bena is looking for a job. He is well aware that his past may hamper his chances, but he says he will not allow that to bring him down.

Court summons Muthama, Ndemo for theft charges

BY NATION CORRESPONDENT

Machakos Senator Johnstone Muthama and former Information Permanent Secretary Bitange Ndemo have been ordered to appear in court to answer charges of theft and abuse of office.

They are among nine people, that including directors of Malili Ranch Ltd, a land buying company, who were ated over the acquisition

of land for the construction of the proposed Konza Techno City. The others are former Commissioner of Lands Zablon Mabea, Mr Ronald Laboso Musengi, a director of Gateway Logistic, Mr Julius Kil-onzo, Mr David Ndolo Ngilai, Mr James Kituku Munguti, Mr Leonard Kyania Kitua and Mr Julius Mbau Nzyuko.

Senior Principal Magistrate Peter Ndwiga yesterday ordered them to appear before the Anti-Corruption Court at Millimani Law Courts in

Nairobi on September 5. In the proposed charges, they are accused of stealing more than Sh179 million being the proceeds of the sale of 5,000 acres to the government through the information ministry. The property belonged to shareholders of

Malili Ranch Ltd. They allegedly stole the money on June 17, 2009. Dr.Ndemo separately faces charges of failing to comply with procurement

rules. The magistrate issued the summons after a successful application by law-yer Paul Muite, who was appointed by the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Keriako Tobiko, to investigate the matter and prosecute the suspects.

No headway in the search for President's car

BY NATION CORRESPONDENT

Special police units mobilised to find a stolen Presidential Escort Unit car are yet to make headway.

The search was extended to out-side Nairobi with special focus on the border towns after reports that the car may have been driven to a

neighbouring country. The vehicle was one of those that escorted President Uhuru Kenyatta to the JKIA. It was driven back to State House before the driver took it to his home. He lost it to cariackers

before reaching his house. Nairobi County police com-mander Benson Kibue yesterday said Chief Inspector David Machui Maina was driving into his com-pound in Utawala, Nairobi when four armed men confronted him.

They forced him into the back seat and drove off. They abandoned him a few metres from the Admin-istration Police Training College in Embakasi six hours later.

Staff identity

The gunmen asked the officer whether the car belonged to him. Mr Machui told them it belonged to the Judiciary. The officer was not armed and did not have his staff identity card.

The victim said that the attackers did not talk much as they drove around the city. They did not also commit any other crime. One of them was masked and

for the period they held him, the masked man did not utter a word, pointing to the possibility that he knew the victim.

Police records indicate that M Machui was robbed of Sh50,000 but State House spokesperson Manoah Esipisu yesterday said the officer lost Sh60,000. The officer also lost his mobile phone, an

LG400, watch, and clothes. The dark blue BMW 735, regis-tered as GK A374E was purchased in 2000. However, it had a civilian number plate KAW 479Y at the time it was stolen.

"The vehicle was used purely for police duties," Mr Esipisu said and dismissed reports that the vehicle was armoured and was part of the presidential fleet.



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