



FLORAH AND FORTUNE

TAKING A STEP OF FAITH 8,000 MILES LONG

Once there were two kids in Zimbabwe. These two had many things in common: both were part of large families, both spent their childhoods in grueling poverty and both had a strong drive to educate themselves. They didn't know each other in their early years, not until they both spent time studying in America.

But when they finally came together, they created a union that has built not only a strong Christian family but also pioneering programs at four universities on two continents, including Lipscomb University.

“GOD HAS CALLED US TO MORE CHALLENGE, SO IF THIS MOVE IS GOING TO BE MORE CHALLENGING, THEN PERHAPS WE SHOULD TAKE IT.”

FLORAH

Florah Mhlanga was one of nine children, the daughter of parents who knew the key to their children's future was education. The primary focus of her family was on each child earning his or her high school diploma.

“We did very well in school,” said Florah, noting that the older siblings pitched in to work and support the educational goals of the younger siblings. (Florah was the eighth child.) “We never wanted to disappoint our older siblings or our parents. We used paraffin lamps to study into the night.”

Most of her siblings became nurses or teachers. In 1984, Florah became the first in the family to earn a bachelor's degree, studying animal science at the University of Zimbabwe. She went to work at Zimbabwe's ministry of agriculture, but soon a colleague suggested she apply for a scholarship to Michigan State University. So by 1988, she was bound for America.

FORTUNE

Fortune Mhlanga was one of seven children. His father was a brick-layer and a preacher, trained by the first Church of Christ missionary in Zimbabwe. The family practiced subsistence farming to get by. “Even today, I can see where the blisters on my hands were from that work,” he said.

He progressed to the 10th grade in Africa. Then his brother, who lived in the U.S., arranged for Fortune to complete his high school education at Harding Academy in Memphis, Tenn. In 1980, “I got on a plane with 40 dollars and a suitcase,” he said. “For me, that was some real money!”

He completed all the requirements needed to enter Harding University in just one year. During his college career, he had to raise all the money needed himself, sometimes working 70 to 80 hours a week while also taking classes. Even with that, and a change of major from engineering to computer science, he finished his bachelor's degree in three-and-a-half years.

After graduation, he returned to Zimbabwe to work in the computer and technology industry. But after only two years, he, too, was tapped for a scholarship to attend an American university, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, where he got his master's and doctoral degrees. He graduated in 1993 and headed back to Africa to fulfill his commitment to work at the University of Zimbabwe.

For more information on the College of Computing & Technology, go to www.lipscomb.edu/technology.

To read more about Lipscomb's Department of Biology, go to www.lipscomb.edu/biology.



If you would like to see more about the Mhlangas, snap a photo of the QR code and check out the video featuring the romantic story of their first date.

FLORAH

Florah finished her studies in Michigan in 1994, and she also was committed by the terms of her scholarship to work at the University of Zimbabwe. She became an assistant professor in animal sciences. One day, a colleague invited her to eat lunch in the faculty dining room, and there sat the colleague's roommate: Fortune. The two hit it off. Florah mentioned she was in need of some curtains for her apartment. An enterprising Fortune offered to bring her some he had on hand.

"We talked and talked and talked and laughed. We had so much in common," said Florah. "And guess what...he invited me to his congregation!" Florah was raised a Methodist, but she was very impressed with Fortune's invitation, so she accepted.

The couple attended Avondale Church of Christ in Harare, Zimbabwe, and later Florah was baptized by Fortune's brother. The two were married in 1995.

FLORAH AND FORTUNE

Since then, the couple's journey back to America, and eventually to Lipscomb, has been led by God, they say. Every move they have made was not one they were looking for, but one instead brought into their lives by divine intervention.

Their careers progressed in Zimbabwe, with Florah becoming a department chair and Fortune moving on to become director of the Informatics and Electronics Center, a research and design center established by the government to promote sustainable infrastructure development.

In 2001, Fortune got a call from Faulkner University in Montgomery, Ala. They wanted to start a computer science program and were having a hard time finding a Christian who held a Ph.D. in the field and had the needed experience.

"This was a time when Zimbabwe was really experiencing economic hardship," Fortune said. "I had to wake up at 4 a.m. to go queue for gas. Life was becoming difficult." Plus the couple had two sons by this time.

So when he visited Faulkner and discovered they also had a position teaching genetics in the biology department for his wife, he knew this opportunity was God's work.

"We really thought it was God's way of shielding us from these difficulties," said Florah, "and we had two sons whom we had to provide for. I feel like our journey has been ordained by God. We never thought we would move anywhere. We were so content."

But move they did in 2002. They spent five years at Faulkner and then moved on to Abilene Christian University when that institution began strengthening its computer science program. Fortune's motto is, "God has called us to more challenge, so if this move is going to be more challenging, then perhaps we should take it."

"I GOT ON A PLANE WITH \$40 AND A SUITCASE. FOR ME, THAT WAS SOME REAL MONEY!"

“WHEN I SEE SOMEONE FROM A DIFFERENT CULTURE... I SHOULD RESPECT MY FELLOW MAN AS MUCH AS GOD DOES.”



When they made the move to ACU, Florah became the first female minority and the first international professor in the university's Department of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.

FLORAH AND FORTUNE AT LIPSCOMB

The couple and their two sons, Carl and Craig, came to Lipscomb in 2011 when Florah joined the biology faculty and Fortune became director of the newly established School of Computing & Informatics. The school has rapidly grown during his tenure, becoming the College of Computing & Technology in 2014 and now offers nine bachelor's degrees and four master's degrees.

Florah has become an associate dean in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences and coordinates the annual Student Scholars Symposium, where almost 100 undergraduate students gather to present their research in various disciplines.

But in addition to their 9-to-5 jobs, the Mhlangas are also working in their off hours on humanitarian projects to assist the people of Zimbabwe. They have not forgotten where they came from, they say.

During their time at Faulkner, the couple attended Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, Ala., and worked with the church's first mission team to help build an orphanage in Zimbabwe. Now working through the nonprofit 100X, the Landmark church, the Mhlangas and others have helped develop the entire village over the years, building a church, a clinic and a farm as well, Fortune said.

He is currently working to coordinate future mission teams from Lipscomb to go work in the village as well. There are plans to build a school and a vocational training center in the future.

“Since coming to America to teach, I tell all my students, ‘Just reflect on God's creation,’” said Fortune. “We are all here to please God and it doesn't matter whether I am African or Chinese. God sees us all as a very good thing. So when I see someone from a different culture, I should see them as a good thing. God created him, so I should respect my fellow man as much as God does.” 