

SEMINARIAN: MNGSFORD TARAITSI

MY SHORT LIFE STORY:

Hi. My name is Kingsford Mcfied Tago Taraiti. However, Kingsford Taraiti is my official name. Kingsford is my given name, and Taraiti is my grandfather's name given to me by my father. The name Tago is my ancestral name passed on to me as the son of a chief, which means "the shining pearl of the deep blue ocean." My grandfather was a paramount chief in the west coast of Bougainville. He was a sailor all his life and had many wives from every place he used to go ashore for rest. He was a great conqueror of lands and protector of his people. He ruled with peace and love and was very popular throughout the west coast of Bougainville. And that is why he was known as Taraiti Tago, which means the great shining pearl of the deep blue ocean. Anyway, despite of my grandfather having many wives, I am one of his grandsons from his last caring and beautiful wife. The name Mcfied was given to me by a European from Switzerland named Francis Mcfied. I never saw him because he left for Switzerland while I was still a child, before the Bougainville crisis began. My Father's name is James Nusu Taraiti and my mothers' name is Cunera Varpin Tomade. I am the third in the family of five, excluding my parents. There are three boys; Jameslee, Peter, and myself, and two girls; Maryann and Geraldine. Both my parents were primary school teachers, in those days we used to call them community school teachers. My father is from Torokina on the west coast of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, and my mother is from New Ireland and East New Britain Province because her parents were from these two provinces.

I was born on the 20th of October 1984, at the Arawa General Hospital in Kieta, Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. When I was five, the civil war broke out in Bougainville between the Papua New Guinea Defense Force and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). My father left his teaching career and joined the BRA as one of the advisers of Francis Ona, the Known Mekamui Leader. My father left us with my mother, and we were separated for fifteen years until we were reunited again as a family. The struggles and difficulties we went through during the crisis are the saddest moments in my life. Sometimes I questioned how a family that has separated for fifteen years, almost reaching the point of death, could be once again reunited. This is because sometimes God has his own ways different from human ways. I have a lot to tell about how dangerous my life was as a young boy growing up during the crisis. I want to write a book about my life during the Bougainville crisis, its challenges and difficulties, how I had to struggle to come out as a victim and the unexpected events that people must expect when a government that people have trusted has turned its back on its own people. However, I do not know where to start, who would help me publish my story, and who would support me. Sometimes I do not want to tell about my life during the crisis because when I begin telling my story people begin to cry, so I am sort of forgetting by not telling it.

My Academic Life:

At my early age especially during the beginning of the civil war I was very lucky because my mother was a teacher, so she taught me how to read and write during the crisis. I completed my grade one, two and three at the camps in the jungle where we were placed to stay by the BRA while we were on the run in fear of the Papua New Guinea Defense Force. I never did my grade four and five. I just continued to grade six. I attended Bana Provincial High School in Bougainville for four years. Then I applied to Ulapia Minor Seminary and was accepted to study

for two years. Instead of going to university I continued on to Rapolo Major Seminary. Now I am in my final year at the Catholic Theological Institute of Papua New Guinea. By coming out from the crisis in Bougainville my academic life is very poor and challenging. Sometimes when my relatives ask me how my life is going in school, in most cases I make jokes, telling them not to expect good grades from a jungle boy just coming out from the crisis.

For me to be in school is very exciting because I want to know more. I want to be like others who have privileges and opportunities to strive for better education even though I lost my father at the first year of my seminary life. Maybe God wanted to test me about the call to the priesthood. It does not matter in my high school days, just after the cease fire, whether the same roof we were sleeping under becomes the building for attending classes, and at the

same time is used as our refectory. Sometimes the school ran out of rations for more than one week but that did not stop us from attending classes. Sometimes we slept with no roof because the wind had blown all the sago leaves from the roof. I strove to get a good education just like others have, despite a low standard of education in the province. I was lucky God had chosen me to follow his path.

Sometimes my spiritual director asks me why I want to become a priest? And my answer often was: honestly I don't know why but ask Jesus because it is not my vocation but his. God has his own ways and they are not human ways. When my father died while still in high school I was thinking of quitting school because all my support came from him. No relatives ever supported me in my academic life, only my beloved mother. In Melanesia if you have many relatives who are working, then you are a lucky one because they will assist you. As for me, all my life it is just like I am living a life with no tail or relatives to support me. A lone and silent striver I am. That is one thing I am being positive about in my academic life.

My Spiritual Life:

My spiritual life is strong and concrete because my parents, especially my mother, is a very committed person who devoted every day of her life to raising us up as strong Catholic believers. I cannot imagine even a single day or night when she would miss prayers. I am just glad that my parents' influence on me has contributed a lot to my vocation to the priesthood. Many things about the spiritual life I never understood them properly while still a teenager. And I presumed that maybe my mother and father understood everything about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Saints and Angels. However, when I entered the seminary it was an eye opening to me because everything was new to me. As in my young youth, the first and second year in the seminary I found it very hard to cope with the life in the seminary. The new way of life, new rules, new regulations, new environment and being under a very strict rector of the seminary who is a European is like living behind bars. Being waken up very early in the morning for morning prayers and Mass celebration is a big challenge. I never get used to meditation. And often times instead of meditating I often went fast asleep, sometimes snoring away and disturbing others. But I always treasured a piece of advice from a cleaner of the seminary, an old man. He used to say to me: son never try to be a mature priest who is already experienced in the priestly life. Be who you are. Things are very difficult for you because you are still young and new to a life in the seminary. Wait patiently, your time will come and all your difficulties will no longer be a burden to you but nourishment for your priestly life in the future. This is very true indeed, since being a senior today as I reflected back, whatever that is seen as a burden to me in my early years in the seminary is now what I treasure most. They said studying toward priesthood takes more than ten years, but I say without God it will take centuries to form a priest, or else it won't last maybe a week. I enjoy and appreciate my spiritual exercises in the seminary because through them I find

my true identity as an image of God. I find a real freedom, a freedom where everyone is seeking for it and yet only some reach out for it. Let me tell you, you will never know your real self until you seek, find, understand and accept the spiritual part of your life.

My Social Life:

In my social life I am an introvert person. I am not a good outgoing person. I am so shy in socializing with other people and especially the opposite sex. Asking help from others is what I often feel ashamed about. During any discussion I find it very hard to share my opinion and often pull back. I want to do something individually. I just follow and agree on what others have decided. I do not want to speak in public or take part in any leadership roles or even do anything that might put me in front of the public attention. This is not because I am incapable of doing such things, but because I myself do not like to be hated, to be embarrassed, to be rejected, excluded and not be loved. All I want is to be accepted, to be praised, to be acknowledged, to be loved and more so encouraged to be part of the family, community, and society as a whole. And sometimes I thought being an introvert is perfect because of feeling secure in one's comfort zones. But when I entered the seminary I was encouraged and directed that a priest is a leader and a public figure. If I wanted to be a priest and a good future leader for the people of God then I had to start acting like one now or never. Be open, face the challenge, turn my weaknesses into strengths and lead by example to change what

needs to be changed. After then my life changed. I become an open minded person. My personal relationship to God and others become a positive encounter and enriching.

Sometimes they called me man of all trades because I do my best in anything which I am assigned to do or what I am freely volunteering to do. I love music; that is why I am a musician. I love singing and composing songs of any kind. I like playing soccer, rugby, volleyball, basketball, athletics, dart, and muscle arts. During lesser times I like to crack jokes with friends, read books of any kind, give advice to people, watch movies, and even dance, because I come from a culture where we sing and dance to the beat of the bamboo band and bamboo pipes or bamboo flutes. Listening to old people's advice is one way of jumping over two mountains to arrive early where you want to go. As a seminarian I also faced challenges with the opposite sex by being attracted to them in a human way. With this awareness in me and with the fact that I am a seminarian I become more in awareness of who I am and who they are. My dream about how may I help the people of God is by seeking God first then I can help change the attitude of the people. This is because to change our negative attitudes into positive attitudes then we can change the world. 'Attitude is Everything.' If we can master our attitudes we can change our life in all aspects of life. I just have this simple formula of what I believe about attitude:

attitude:

=A+J+J+J+J+U+D+E

=1+20+20+9+20++21+4+5=100%

It is our ATTITUDE towards life and work that makes OUR LIFE=100%

It is our ATTITUDE towards GOD and MAN that makes OUR LIFE=100%

By Seminarian Kingsford Taraiti