

Unit 8 WILLIAM KAMKWAMBA

How I Harnessed the Wind

Part 1

Thank you. Two years ago, I stood on the TED stage in Arusha, Tanzania. I spoke very briefly about one of my proudest creations. It was a simple machine that changed my life.

Before that time, I had never been away from my home in Malawi. I had never used a computer. I had never seen **an Internet**¹. On the stage that day, I was so nervous. My English lost, I wanted to vomit. I had never been surrounded by so many **azungu**², white people.

There was a story I wouldn't tell you then. But well, I'm feeling good right now. I would like to share that story today. We have seven children in my family. All sisters, excepting me. This is me with my dad when I was a little boy. Before I discovered the wonders of science, I was just a simple farmer in a country of poor farmers. Like everyone else, we grew **maize**³.

One year, our fortune turned very bad. In 2001 we experienced an awful famine. Within five months all Malawians began to starve to death. My family ate one meal per day, at night. Only three swallows of nsima for each one of us. The food passes through our bodies. We drop down to nothing. In Malawi, the **secondary school**⁴, you have to pay school fees. Because of the hunger, I was forced to drop out of school. I looked at my father and looked at those dry fields. It was the future I couldn't accept.

I felt very happy to be at the secondary school, so I was determined to do anything possible to receive education. So I went to a library. I read books, science books, especially

physics. I couldn't read English that well. I used diagrams and pictures to learn the words around them.

Part 2

Another book put that knowledge in my hands. It said a windmill could pump water and generate electricity. Pump water meant irrigation, **a defense against**⁵ hunger, which we were experiencing by that time. So I decided I would build one windmill for myself. But I didn't have materials to use, so I went to a **scrap yard**⁶ where I found my materials. Many people, including my mother, said I was crazy.

I found a tractor fan, shock absorber, PVC pipes. Using a bicycle frame and an old bicycle **dynamo**⁷, I built my machine. It was one light at first. And then four lights, with switches, and even a circuit breaker, modeled after an electric bell. Another machine pumps water for irrigation.

Queues⁸ of people start lining up at my house to charge their mobile phone. I could not **get rid of**⁹ them. And the reporters came too, which lead to bloggers and which lead to a call from something called TED. I had never seen an airplane before. I had never slept in a hotel. So, on stage that day in Arusha, my English lost, I said something like, "I tried. And I made it."

So I would like to say something to all the people out there like me to the Africans, and the poor who are struggling with your dreams. **God bless**¹⁰. Maybe one day you will watch this on the Internet. I say to you, trust yourself and believe. Whatever happens, don't give up. Thank you.

¹ As Kamkwamba is not a native English speaker, his speech at times contains some errors typical of non-native learners. Note that instead of "an," the article "the" should be used when referring to "the Internet."

² Kamkwamba's native language is Chichewa. "Azungu" is a word from this language.

³ "Maize" is another way to say "corn".

⁴ "Secondary school" is a typical way to say "high school" in British English.

⁵ Something that is "a defense against" aims to protect others from a threatening situation.

⁶ A "scrap yard" is a place where garbage that can't be easily disposed of is kept.

⁷ A "dynamo" is a machine that turns mechanical energy into electric energy.

⁸ The word "queue" is used in British English for "line (of people)."

⁹ When you try to "get rid of" someone, you try to make them leave.

¹⁰ The expression "God Bless," while religious in nature, is usually said in a general way to offer someone good wishes.