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2025 CARTHA Fellow

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I am a Zambian born in Botswana but raised in South Africa. Growing up I had the wonderful privilege of traveling between quite a few countries in the southern part of Africa. This exposure is what fascinated me so much. I grew a love for travelling--it taught me so many profound things in the simplest ways. I was revealed to the simple truth that "you don't know what you don't know" and the only way to find out is to expose yourself. So, at the end of high school, at age 19, I hopped on a plane and 26 hours later landed in Dubuque, Iowa. Discovering and experiencing a different side of things, I also began pursuing my degree in Computer Science at Clarke University.

Even in my early childhood days, I remember being so captivated by the profound preaching of a local pastor that I actually thought that I wanted to become one myself. At 5 years old, my oratorical journey began in the garage of my parents' house where I would line up rows of 2 liter bottles of water and preach to them for hours! Being a pastor is something I have long grown out of wanting to do. However, the desire to inspire, enlighten, impart knowledge, initiate innovation and build relationships through oratory is something that remains at the heart of who I am. All through high school, I was involved in plays, poetry, monologues, public speaking, and debate teams--just trying to find the perfect fit. Finally, in my sophomore year of college at Clarke University, I was introduced by a teacher to storytelling. I attended a storytelling program by Culturall in December of 2023. I wanted to connect with people this way, so, I asked around and found out how I could get involved and started volunteering at Culturall as an Open Book Storyteller. I began to share chapters of my lived experiences, perspectives, and lessons with groups of all kinds and ages.

I found that through my stories of lived experiences, I could initiate lines of innovative thinking and garner relationships all over the world. At such a storytelling event at the Lisbon Public Library, an audience member was CARTHA Founder Usha Balakrishnan. We chatted afterwards and I was soon designated as a CARTHA Fellow. With Usha's encouragement, I launched a new student organization at Clarke University. This effort focuses on developing storytellers among my peers by gathering for workshop sessions from time to time during the semester and practicing our storytelling skills with live audiences.

Only after talking with Usha several times and exchanging many of our experiences, I learned that she had been invited to my storytelling event at the Lisbon Public Library by its director, Elizabeth Hoover de Galvez who had served as a CARTHA Fellow in 2007! It is very exciting for me to continue to discuss with Usha all the prospects of what simple stories can do, how far they can reach, and how these stories can powerfully connect people across different generations and geographies.

