

Second-generation UMHB student from Zimbabwe makes mark

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Tatenda Tavaziva of Zimbabwe, a second-generation University of Mary-Hardin Baylor student, proudly waves a UMHB flag from the sidelines at Crusaders football games.

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By Jennifer Sicking

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

BELTON—Spectators at [University of Mary Hardin-Baylor](#) football games have a hard time not noticing Tatenda Tavaziva on the sidelines, decked out

in a gaudy purple-and-gold outfit and sporting a flag of [Zimbabwe](#) on his back.

It's Tavaziva's way of showing pride in both his past and present.

His father, Timothy Tavaziva, graduated from UMHB and is now an associate pastor at the largest Baptist church in Zimbabwe. After he learned about the Texas Baptist school from missionaries, he moved to Central Texas to study, along with his wife and 4-month-old son, Tatenda.



Tatenda Tavaziva in full Crusader regalia at a UMHB football game.
(Photo by Carol Woodward)

Upon graduation, he went back to Africa, but he dreamed of seeing his son return to Texas to attend his alma mater.

Betty Sue Beebe, UMHB alumni development director, knew Timothy Tavaziva when he attended the university and [First Baptist Church in](#)

[Belton.](#)

“It’s unusual for us to have children of international students to come,” she said of Tatenda. “He’s a young man that’s liked by everyone. He fits into the culture on the campus.”

Tatenda, now a second-semester sophomore, is on his way to earning bachelor’s degrees in accounting and business management. Before he completes his studies at UMHB in 2009, he plans to earn a master’s degree in accounting.

While Tatenda doesn’t remember the university from the first time around, he’s making his mark this time—particularly at sporting events, where his attire combines passion for the Crusaders and his home country.

“Tatenda’s his own person, for sure. He eats, sleeps and breathes the Cru,” said Bear Garza, campus missionary and Tatenda’s friend. “At games, he goes nuts, and people respond to that.”

He wears a hat made from the skin of a [kudu](#), decorated with purple-and-gold tape, along with Zimbabwe and UMHB flags. Sunglasses, with lenses removed, likewise are decorated with purple and gold. His pants have two university flags attached onto them. His shoes are wrapped with purple-and-gold tape and covered with UMHB stickers. He often carries a university flag in one hand and a Crusaders shield in the other.

The Zimbabwean flag he wears on his back is “so I never forget where I came from,” he said. “A lot of people who have gone overseas have forgotten their country’s values and where they came from. I don’t want to forget.”

Although he knew of his father’s dream, Tatenda didn’t think it would be possible for him to attend UMHB. He planned to make a career working at camps in Zimbabwe, and eventually work his way up to a camp director

position.

Then one Saturday in January 2004, he returned home from a camp.

“Dad said: “Pack your bags. You’re going to Mary Hardin-Baylor on Thursday,”” he recalled.

Tatenda arrived in Texas without his luggage. After missing one of his numerous connecting flights, a domino effect ensued, and for two weeks his bags—containing everything to last him five years—were lost.

“I was praying, ‘God, am I supposed to be here?’ I was flipping out,” he said.

He also had a university tuition bill and no money to pay it. When his father attended, international students had scholarships to pay for their tuition.

All of that, he said, taught him to trust in God.

“At home, I trusted Mom for money, Dad for money for fuel, or friends for a place to stay and hang out,” he said. “Coming here put me on the edge. It was symbolic, the lost bags and the \$5,000 I had to pay.”

God has continued to provide a way through scholarships, jobs and friends, he noted.

At the end of semesters, he has warned friends he may not return because of a lack of funds.

“The last day before money is due, someone would say, ‘Here Tatenda, God said to give you \$2,000’ or I’d get a new job that pays more,” he said. “God always comes through.”

He also has been the recipient of the Townsend Memorial Scholarship for two years.

God also has provided in smaller areas. Tatenda often would awake to find a bar of soap, a T-shirt or a new pair of shoes by his door, left by an anonymous donor.

He's also learned about trusting God with his studies and serving others.

At UMHB, he is sophomore class president, works three jobs and is on several club teams, as well as attending football and other sporting events in his purple-and-gold garb.

"By God's grace, he's still giving me a 4.0," he said, noting he was a mediocre student during his high school years in Zimbabwe. "I've just been willing to serve others. I don't think I got any cleverer or suddenly saw the light."

Garza said Tatenda has made an impact on the campus, almost since he started.

"He's a good bridge, a liaison between believers and nonbelievers. He meets them where they are," he said. "He's a leader. If he has a vision, if he puts any effort into it at all, it's going to go through."

UMHB students have embraced Tatenda as well.

"It's been good to see the campus unite around him and be the family for him," Garza said.

Tatenda plans to take what he has learned in and out of the classroom when he returns to Zimbabwe. There, he wants to open a Christian camp, of which there are few in Zimbabwe, for the young to the old.

"Dad always wanted me to preach. Mom wanted me to be an accountant. I always wanted to have fun," he said with a laugh. "I think a camp covers that."

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