



TITLE OF THE BOOK

The boy who never gave up. A refugee's journey to triumph

AUTHOR

Dr. Emmanuel Taban with Andrew Crofts

INFORMATION ON THE BOOK

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INFORMATION ON THE REVIEWER

Reviewer: Mr July Masango

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6982-003X>

Affiliations: Head Of Department Occupational Therapy Services at Evexia Psychiatric Day Hospital Group; Director of Masango Occupational Therapy Services; Sessional Lecturer: University of Pretoria; member of Gauteng Vocational Rehabilitation Task Team (VRTT); Advisory Panel Expert of the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) & Disability Management Consultant at University of Pretoria.

Contact details: july@masangoot.co.za

Declaration of bias: The reviewer has no bias to declare. The author, Dr Emmanuel Taban, happened to be a doctor in the same area facility as the reviewer, Midstream Hill Medical Park, but they do not work together.

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A review of the book THE BOY WHO NEVER GAVE UP written by Emmanuel Taban and Andrew Crofts

Information on the authors

The book is an autobiography, of Emmanuel Taban's life. Dr Taban, a pulmonologist who currently resides and practices in South Africa wrote his memoirs with Andrew Crofts, a well published author and ghost-writer. Born 1979 in South Sudan, Emmanuel Taban was one of five children. At the age of 14 years old, he was tortured by Sudanese government forces, when he was 16 years old, he was forced to convert to Islam and shortly thereafter he fled the civil war-torn Sudan. Not knowing where to go he ended up in a refugee camp in Eritrea. From here he embarked on a perilous journey south, frequently spending weeks on the streets, and encountering many perils. He trekked south to South Africa by bus and on foot, through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, relying on the kindness of strangers. Arriving in Johannesburg, South Africa 18 months after he left Sudan. He was determined to finish his education and with the aid of Catholic missionaries, he completed high school, enrol in medical school, qualified as a doctor, and specialize in pulmonology. A crucial finding in the treatment of hypoxaemia COVID-19 patients was made by Dr Taban, because of his competence and dedication as a doctor and his tenacious refusal to be deterred by setbacks. This son of Sudan has overcome tremendous poverty, racism, and xenophobia to become an internationally renowned South African pulmonologist, by never giving up. Andrew Crofts is a ghostwriter and author who has published more than eighty books <http://andrewcrofts.com/>.

The review

If ever there was a person who embodied passion, perseverance, and constancy, it would be Dr. Taban. He embodies these essential success factors to a tee. The book tells his remarkable life journey. From the worst forms of displacement, homelessness, poverty to freedom and success, a journey of complete transformation and change. Dr. Taban developed his three success principles, which are consistency, passion, and determination (p 243) based on this life experience.

The book has fourteen chapters. It takes the reader on a trip through Dr. Taban's personal experience. *If there was ever a book that deserved to have the word 'epic' in its title, this is it*, as another reviewer¹ of the book puts it. The best thing is that this story is based entirely on true events. The first section of the book describes Dr Taban's upbringing and the challenges he faced and conquered in Sudan. Even though he was raised in a world of extreme poverty, where the entire family resided in a mud cottage with few supplies, he recalls his home as a *loving household*.

The book unearths and reveals the most heart-breaking truth about our African struggles —poor leadership, inequality, and poverty. Sudan is a resource-rich nation, like many other African nations, but it lacks morally strong leaders who could guide it and provide adequate leadership. Dr Taban overcame all of these challenges and adverse situations stronger and more successful. The book describes his upbringing; how he frequently found himself in the thick of civil strife, and how he was not unfamiliar with the bodies of human beings. As a child from a low-income family with few means, Dr Taban's life is essentially the narrative of his struggles to obtain an education. He was imprisoned while pursuing his study, tortured after being suspected of giving information to the enemy. The book details Dr Taban's arduous trek to South Africa. Recounts the many adventures he had while traveling, including living on the streets, traveling occasionally by bus and getting into trouble with the law.

The book bears witness to the fact that churches served as beacons of hope. When Dr Taban arrived in a new city and had nowhere to go, he would seek refuge and aid at churches. Mostly, these would be Catholic churches. Here he was given food, temporary housing, and money. When he arrived in South Africa, he sought refuge from a life on the streets once more by visiting a Catholic church. Here he was helped to get a job, finish high school, and enrolled in medical school, graduating in 2004. In chapter 11 Dr Taban describes his first visit back to Sudan, after

his graduation as a medical doctor, under the heading: A painful reunion. There seemed to be nothing positive happening anywhere in his home country, and he criticizes both the politicians and the state of the nation. In the end, Sudan would be divided into two, with South Sudan being founded in 2011. He returned to South Africa and today Dr Taban is recognized as one of the few black pulmonologists practicing in South Africa and with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic he received international recognition for his work.

Personal reflections of the reviewer, relevance to occupational therapy, South Africa, and Africa at large

The story of Dr Taban elucidates a sad reality that is experienced by many South African occupational therapists, (including students and clinicians) and even the patients that we treat, who are from underprivileged backgrounds. It is an undeniable reality that in Africa inequality, poverty, financial hardship, poor leadership and lack of access to resources, still leads to severe occupational injustice and occupational deprivation. The lack of exposure and stimulation to a living soul, with no resources and no sense of hope, can account to the constant rise in unemployment rate in the country and ultimately poverty. These factors have a negative impact on occupational engagement and occupational performance.

However, there is an interesting phenomenon that is difficult to understand and one can only make sense of it in hindsight. Despite the environmental difficulties, hurdles and hardship, Dr Taban consistently applied himself, and he never felt sorry for himself. He was determined to be educated, to transform his mind and ultimately change his life and build a better future for his family.

He was probably cornered to apply and experience a deeper sense of personal causation and self-efficacy. When we are cornered as human beings, and fight for survival, we learn to trust our instincts, we become intuitive, and rely on the unseen powers and unlimited supply. We surrender to life and become hungry for opportunities. We become humbled and connect to the true deeper sense of life.

Though things seemed not to be favourable to Dr Taban in his journey, I strongly believe that there were some things that were recalibrated in him. He was building capacity and resilience. Truths that must be taught to younger generations *who have life easy*. To not give up when faced with hardship in life. To develop a *consolidated task concept*. The story of Dr Taban reminds me of our late former President Nelson Mandela's journey and specifically his speech during the Rivonia Trial²: *"During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die"*. This book supports what we know, that South Africa and Africa need good leaders, current and in the future, who not only seek to empower themselves. It shows how it takes a deeper level of faith and vision to be able to endure hardship and hope for a better future and liberty for all people. Dr Taban's story reminds me that *where there is a will, there is always a way!* One just needs to believe in the small light that they possess in them, and trust in the journey, trust the process! Live in the now, tomorrow will sort itself out. We are only assured of today!

Personally, I can deeply connect with this book. Reading it I had goosebumps throughout most parts of the book and tears here and there, because I could identify with what the writer was going through. It was an emotional read for me! Though not as intense as he did but having to overcome the hardship, and having to live in the things that are not as though they were, keeping the hope alive, having faith and trusting the process and cycle of life – always having to take leaps of faith, in my walk as an occupational therapy student, and professional.

As a qualified occupational therapist, and PhD candidate, I remember when my academic and professional journey started. It was in grade 7 that I started selling maize (just like the boys who stand at the robots in Gauteng, and sell maize, I was one of them). I had no options, and my parents could not afford to buy me clothes and other essentials for primary school, such as school uniform. For me, it was at the University of the Witwatersrand that I started to use a bathtub, shower, eating nice meals at res and being exposed to all the fancy things that I am now enjoying, later.

To others these were normal, but to some of us these were fascinating! Then, it makes me wonder how many other African people today, still undergo the same experiences that I did? Just like the great Dr Taban? And yet, this is not taken serious by the government authorities.

For me, I knew nothing about occupational therapy as a scholar. It took a high school teacher to identify potential in me. He thought that I would be a good occupational therapist and he listed it as one of my study options, when I was accepted by Wits. The journey was rather rough, from teaching myself how to speak English, to having serious inferiority complex among the white fellow students, overcoming the failing of my first and third years due to inability to understand concepts, sleeping in the library while waiting for my psychology supplementary examinations, not having food at res, being kicked out of res after failing, and traveling with a taxi from Ivory Park, where I was squatting with my sister (sleeping on the floor, for the entire term).

Despite all these experiences, one thing that I can say about occupational therapy is *that it transforms the person that you are*. You must allow the truth of knowledge to hit your heart and have you change the way you live, then you can be a good example and possess great therapeutic use of self. Unfortunately as therapists, we cannot be hypocritical – i.e. preaching self-care to our patients, yet we do not take care of ourselves. All of these challenges and suffering produce perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. These circumstances develop and build resilience in life, Nelson Mandela suffered for the nations, because he had a goal in mind and he was willing to die for it. How we need more such leaders. May God bless Africa!

This book is a must read for all occupational therapists especially those working and living in Africa.

REFERENCES

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