

# Finding my voice

## Daniel Stone

As a child, I had a stammer. At the worst of times, I would wait for what seemed like an eternity for the word I wanted to say to leave my lips. As I grew older I learned to control my breathing and my often debilitating condition was reduced to a minor inconvenience. Alongside insecurities about my speech, was a belief that my words were not particularly valuable. At the time, I was 18 and believed that I had accomplished very little of note – a good set of GCSE and A level results – but nothing worth shouting about.

Three influences I will refer to helped me to find my voice and to take pride in it.

**The first were my parents**, who were devout Christians. They taught me that I could change the world through prayer and by being ‘salt and light’. I saw my environment, not as fixed, but as something that could be changed if humankind desired it and God willed it.

**The second was a teacher, the late Dennis Edwards**, who managed to convert history lessons into quests to understand and transform injustices in contemporary society. With his encouragement, I joined Tide~ Network’s **Let’s Talk Initiative**, where young people across Birmingham discussed youth-led responses to climate change.

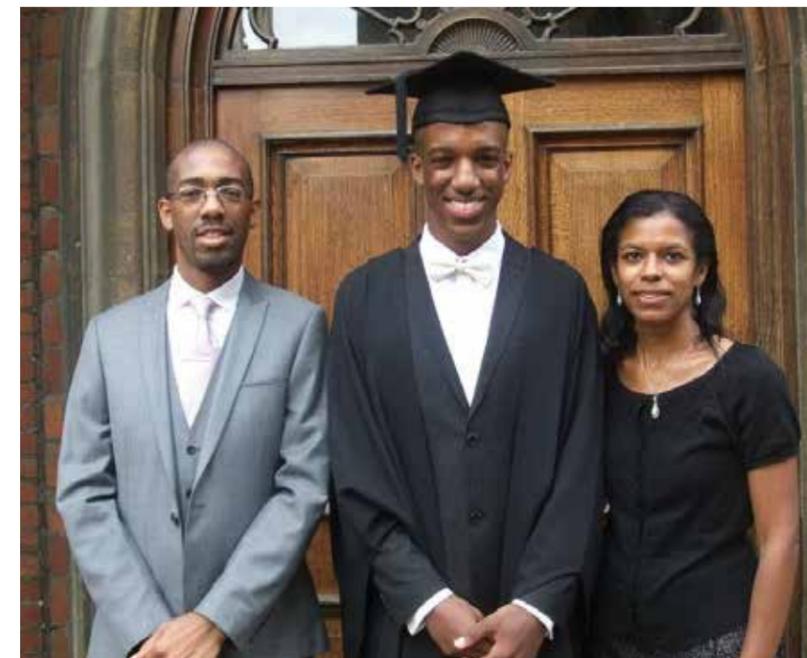
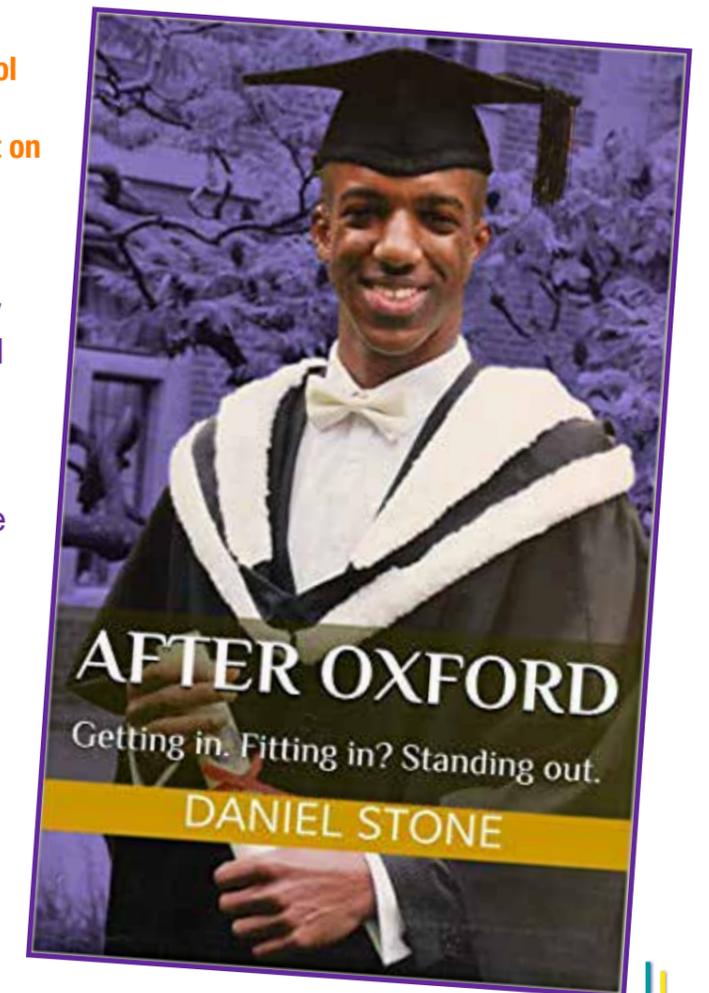
**The third was a mentor, Councillor Paulette Hamilton**. I joined the Labour Party after one of Mr Edwards’ lessons on Keir Hardie and social reform movements. Paulette was my local councillor and someone who believed in aspects of my potential before I had recognised them myself. She asked me to speak to

a group of Year 11 students and their parents about my experiences at school.

**Daniel was a student at Hampsted Hall School and involved in the Tide~ Let’s talk project. Seeing ‘After Oxford’ - we asked him to reflect on his personal journey to a wider awareness.**

As I delivered my talk, I could see how much my stories of exam success and university aspirations inspired those sitting in the audience. I never again underestimated the power that comes when we share our unique perspective on life.

In May of 2020, I self-published a memoir titled **‘After Oxford’**. It tells my journey of growing up in inner city Birmingham, studying at the University of Oxford, and then pursuing a career with meaning. It sets out to be an honest account that details my failures as well as my successes. There can be no doubt that my identity as Black, working class and non-London-born, set me apart from many of my peers. But in experiencing this difference, I also found balance, self-confidence and an ability to see difference as a strength.



**Photos:**

**The Let’s Talk Climate Change planners take a break at Millennium Point.**

**Daniel with his parents at his graduation**



People often comment that I am very young to have written a memoir – and I suppose that I am. However, I believe that we don't only need to hear the voices of those people who have reached the pinnacle of their mountain. The struggles of those who are mid-climb can help those who are a few metres below to navigate the next steps of their journey.

I looked up to people like Dennis Edwards and Paulette Hamilton who had dedicated their lives to social causes. They were two role models among many that I either encountered in real life or read about in books. I observed how heroes like Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr had allowed an initial spark of compassion to guide political movements, career decisions and campaigns against injustice.

**Dennis Edwards was a Tide~Trustee.**

**He had a key role in enabling young people take the lead in 'Let's Talk'.**

**He is much missed.**



**Daniel ... contemplating at Elmina ,Ghana**

But I also observed how easy it is for people to allow this spark to fade. In the darkest moments of history, we've seen the powerless people become disenfranchised, murdered and enslaved. As an 18-year-old, I visited a slave castle on the coast of Ghana, built by the Portuguese and then later inhabited by the Dutch and then the British, as European superpowers played with the world like a game of Monopoly.

The British education system never required us to critically examine oppression and injustice.

**We were never asked to reflect on how and why, people were able to dehumanise other people for centuries, and which parts of that psyche are still alive in us today. If we are not taught to recognise oppression, it is easy to overlook it.**

I've remained engaged with social issues because of the lesson that I was taught by my parents. I do not believe the world is fixed. We have an opportunity to sanitize our environments against the viruses of hatred and injustice, and in some cases, to push for transformative change.

**Educators** – whether teachers, parents or community leaders – **should help people to develop a deeper understanding of the world, to be critical of our internal thoughts, and to find our voice in whatever environment we are in.**



**Let's talk ...  
Climate Change**

**Is there potential to set up a Let's Talk project in Autumn 2021 linked to the UN conference on climate change due to take place in Glasgow in November?**

**Could we bring together a small group of sixth formers from 3 or 4 schools to take on the lead role? Key activities could include a structure for school based debate leading to a city wide event to propose ways in which Birmingham could respond to the challenges.**

**We are seeking teachers interested in setting this up .....**

**Please express your interest to Jeff Serf: [jeffserf@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jeffserf@yahoo.co.uk)**

