

## ***Prologue***

### **Struggle and Stability**

In 1985, Nigeria's population was actually grappling with economic hardship and political instability. The country was under military rule, which as is in most cases, resulted in human rights abuses and limited freedoms. Many Nigerians were dissatisfied with the government's performance and were seeking change.

And yet, the whispers of childhood dreams still linger, echoes of a time when imagination knew no bounds and possibilities seemed endless. As we journey through life, these whispers grow fainter, yet their resonance remains, a gentle reminder of the passions and aspirations that once set our hearts ablaze. In the quiet moments, when the noise of the world recedes, we can still hear the soft whisper of our deepest desires, urging us to remember, to hold on, and to never let go. These dreams, though they may evolve, remain the essence of who we are, the fuel that drives us forward, and the light that guides us through life's darkest moments.

### **Nigeria's Economic and Political Landscape (1983-1993)**

In the 1980s, Nigeria's economy was facing significant challenges. The country was under military rule, which resulted in human rights abuses and limited freedoms. Many Nigerians were dissatisfied with the government's performance and were seeking change. The transition from the Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration to the General Muhammadu Buhari and General Ibrahim Babangida regimes were very significant periods in Nigeria's history, marked by military coups and authoritarian rule, poverty, and hunger in the land.

The transition from the Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration to the General Muhammadu Buhari and General Ibrahim Babangida regimes were very significant periods in Nigeria's history, marked by military coups and authoritarian rule, poverty, and hunger in the land. Some key events and major timelines includes:

**December 31, 1983:** Coup led by Muhammadu Buhari in which the military seized control, ousting President Shehu Shagari's civilian government, citing corruption, economic struggles, and social unrest as reasons for the takeover. The new government introduced tough rules, including the "War Against Indiscipline," (WAI) to boost order and fight corruption.

**August 27, 1985:** Coup led by Ibrahim Babangida in which Babangida overthrew Buhari's regime, citing dissatisfaction with Buhari's policies and leadership style, which he believed were detrimental to the nation's progress. Babangida's government introduced several changes, including the creation of new states and local governments, and an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

### **Characteristics of the Regimes**

- Buhari's Regime (1983-1985): Marked by authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and suppression of the press. The government introduced harsh punishments for crimes, including draconian decrees that limited basic freedoms.
- Babangida's Regime (1985-1993): Characterized by a controlled transition programme aimed at returning Nigeria to democracy, but ultimately marred by delays, broken promises, and the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election.

- **Economic Instability:** Both regimes struggled with economic instability, with SAP leading to high inflation, job losses, and economic hardship under Babangida's rule.
- **Human Rights:** Human rights abuses were a common feature of both regimes, with Buhari's government suppressing the press and limiting basic freedoms, while Babangida's regime was marked by mass protests and political instability.

### **Leadership and swag**

President Muhammadu Buhari was the Head of State from December 1983 to August 1985, when he was overthrown in a military coup led by General Ibrahim Babangida. The regime was known for the followings;

- 1, **War Against Indiscipline (WAI):** This was Launched in 1984, WAI aimed to address the perceived lack of public morality and civic responsibility in Nigerian society. The policy enforced strict discipline, including queuing at bus stops and punishing civil servants for tardiness.
- 2, **Anti-Corruption Drive:** The regime embarked on a strong anti-corruption campaign, arresting and jailing many politicians from the previous civilian government for corruption. The regime also investigated public officials' assets and froze bank accounts of suspected fraudsters.
- 3, **Economic Reforms:** The regime introduced austerity measures to combat inflation and reduce Nigeria's foreign debt. These measures included cutting government spending, imposing import restrictions, and halting capital projects.
- 4, **Tough Stance on Crime:** The regime adopted a tough stance on crime, with severe punishments for offenses like drug trafficking, counterfeiting, and arson. Notably, Decree 20

mandated the death penalty for certain crimes, including drug trafficking.

**4, Expulsion of Illegal Immigrants:** In 1985, The government expelled approximately 700,000 illegal immigrants, mostly from West African countries, sparking controversy and criticism.

"War Against Indiscipline" and economic crisis.

### **General Ibrahim Babangida:**

President Babangida took power in August 1985 and ruled Nigeria until his resignation in 1993. He initiated a transition to democracy but annulled the June 12, 1993, presidential election, considered Nigeria's freest and fairest. Here are five key aspects of Babangida's regime:

**Annulment of June 12 Election:** Babangida's decision to annul the June 12, 1993, presidential election, widely regarded as Nigeria's freest and fairest election, sparked widespread protests, civil unrest, and a national crisis. The election was won by Moshood Abiola, but Babangida cited irregularities as the reason for annulment.

**Transition to Civilian Rule:** Babangida's regime was marked by a prolonged transition to civilian rule. He created two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), and held elections, but ultimately annulled the presidential election.

**Economic Reforms:** Babangida introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) to diversify Nigeria's economy and reduce reliance on oil. However, the program had mixed results and was criticized for exacerbating economic hardship.

**Creation of New States:** Babangida's regime created 11 new states in Nigeria, including Akwa Ibom, Katsina, Abia, Enugu, Delta, Jigawa, Kebbi, Osun, Kogi, Taraba, and Yobe.

**Controversial Leadership Style:** Babangida's leadership style was marked by controversy, including human rights abuses, suppression of dissent, and manipulation of power. His regime was also criticized for its role in perpetuating military rule and undermining democratic institutions.

### **The Economy**

The economy in 1985 was struggling as expressed in the economic indices:

**Economic mismanagement:** Military regimes often lacked transparency and accountability, leading to corruption and poor economic policies.

**Corruption:** The military government was accused of corruption, which further exacerbated economic woes.

**Dependence on oil:** Nigeria's economy was heavily reliant on oil exports, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. The economy was heavily reliant on petroleum exports, which accounted for 87% of export receipts and 77% of the federal government's current revenue in 1988. This dependence made the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices.

**Economic Decline:** The country's per capita real gross national product declined by 4.8% annually from 1980 to 1987, leading to Nigeria's classification as a low-income country by the World Bank in 1989.

**Inflation:** Rising inflation rates posed a significant challenge, reducing the purchasing power of Nigerians and affecting their standard of living.

**Unemployment:** High unemployment rates contributed to social and economic instability, with many Nigerians struggling to find jobs.

**Poor Infrastructure:** Inadequate infrastructure, including roads, power supply, and water resources, hindered economic growth and development. These challenges were further complicated by inconsistent economic policies, corruption, and a lack of skilled personnel, which limited the country's economic potential.

### **Rivers State**

Rivers State, like other states in Nigeria, was affected by the military rule and economic instability. Living conditions in Nigeria during 1985, was indeed marked by economic hardship, military rule, and social challenges. The state was grappling with poverty, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure, making life tough for many indigenes

Many rural areas in Nigeria and indeed Rivers State, during this time were faced with challenges such as:

**Limited access to basic services:** Rural areas often had limited access to healthcare, education, and other essential services.

**Economic hardship:** The economic crisis affected rural communities, leading to poverty and limited economic opportunities, life was indeed difficult.

**Social challenges:** Access to essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure was limited, particularly in rural areas. Other Social Challenges includes; Limited access to education, especially in rural areas, had limited access to quality education, leading to low literacy rates and limited opportunities. The healthcare system was

underdeveloped, and many Nigerians lacked access to basic medical care, leading to high mortality rates and the spread of diseases. Poverty and income inequality glared the citizenry in the eye; the economic crisis and poverty affected many rural folks, leading to income inequality and social unrest.

**Limited infrastructure:** Many areas, especially rural communities, lacked basic infrastructure such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity.

**Social unrest:** The economic and political instability led to social unrest, protests, and demonstrations.

### **The People and Impact of hardship on daily Living**

In 1985, Nigeria was experiencing significant economic challenges that impacted daily life for its citizens. Although specific details about 1985 are scarce, current economic hardship in Nigeria provides insight into potential historical struggles.

#### **Economic Challenges**

**Inflation:** Rising prices of essential goods like food and fuel would have affected household budgets, particularly for low-income families.

**Unemployment:** High unemployment rates, especially among youth, would have contributed to economic strain on individuals and families.

**Income Inequality:** Uneven distribution of wealth and resources would have exacerbated poverty and hardship for vulnerable populations.

#### **Impact on Daily Life**

Food Security: Economic hardship would have made it difficult for people to access basic necessities like food, leading to food insecurity and potential malnutrition.

Healthcare: Limited financial resources would have restricted access to healthcare services, making it challenging for people to receive proper medical attention.

Education: Economic difficulties would have affected access to education, potentially leading to lower educational attainment and reduced opportunities.

Mental Health: The stress and uncertainty of economic hardship would have taken a toll on mental health, potentially leading to increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

### **Potential Solutions**

Job Creation Initiatives: Investing in job creation programs, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support could help reduce unemployment rates.

Social Safety Nets: Strengthening social safety nets, such as cash transfer programs, food assistance, and healthcare subsidies, could provide immediate relief to vulnerable populations.

Infrastructure Development: Prioritizing infrastructure development, including roads, energy, and telecommunications, could enhance productivity and attract investment.

Fiscal Reforms: Implementing prudent fiscal policies, including effective tax administration, budget transparency, and debt management, could ensure fiscal sustainability and promote public trust in government economic management.



In conclusion, Nigeria's state in 1985 was marked by military rule, economic hardship, and political instability. The leadership transition from Buhari to Babangida would shape the country's future, including its transition to democracy and the challenges that came with it. The legacy of this period continues to influence Nigeria's development and politics today.

In 1985, Nigeria's economy was facing significant challenges, which impacted the stability and struggles of the masses.

The country's per capita real gross national product declined by 4.8% annually from 1980 to 1987, leading to widespread poverty and reduced living standards.

Nigeria's economy was heavily reliant on oil exports, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. Rising inflation rates and high unemployment further exacerbated economic hardship for many Nigerians.

The Buhari regime, which took power in 1983, implemented policies like the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) to address perceived moral decay and civic irresponsibility. However, it was the Babangida regime that introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 to revamp the economy. While SAP aimed to stimulate economic growth, reduce poverty, and diversify the economy, it had mixed results and led to increased corruption, inflation, and debt. The masses in Nigeria during this period faced significant struggles, including reduced access to basic services.

Government spending cuts under SAP led to decreased access to essential services like healthcare and education. Many Nigerians experienced worsening living standards due to economic policies and rising inflation. Protests and civil unrest increased due to economic hardship and perceived

government corruption. Overall, the stability of the masses in Nigeria in 1985 was precarious, with many struggling to make ends meet amidst economic decline and inadequate government support.

# I

## **The Meeting**

A certain **Oldman** and I lived together when I did my fishing tutelage in 1985, and we fished for three months in an island called Tamgbolo Sunju. We engaged in very intimate discussions each time we were awake but he never told me his name nor did he ask me my name. He just called out 'my son' and I will shout back 'pa' when we needed each other's attention. The rest of the community called him '**Opuada**' and call me '**Iyo**'. For the Oldman nothing mattered. Our stay together was temporary, even life is temporary, so he believes.

When my Auntie first introduced me to him, she gave my name as **Okponja**, and simply called him '**Itubonibo**'; meaning my customer. At that meeting I observed a couple of things for which I should have distrusted him, but no, not at all. I trust my Auntie's judgment. Everyone called my Auntie '**Dada**', but on her boat is written ***Hannah Wilson Jamabo***. She was a tender hearted, kind and caring grandmother. She understood my worries and desires, and that was her way to give me a soft landing by engaging my mind. "I pass through here every eight days" she said, and I will take you home whenever you so desire, but while you are here, be humble so that you can learn meaningful things from him, he is a very educated retired worker. I nodded my head in the affirmative while I watched the old man smile. Dada left us, went back to her boat and waved at me as the engine roared and the boat sped off. Dada's boatman was Adokiye, a tall young, dark handsome man, a close relative and fellow clansman of the Ikeopuso heritage. My initial worry about the Oldman was on his doubts on my strength

and capability, “Ah Itubonibo, this one does not have strength, he is too tender, can he even cook, not to talk about fetch fire wood”, the Oldman had remarked. With full smile and open hands, My Auntie dragged me to herself and gestured to the Oldman “teach him, and guide him too, he will learn, that is why I have brought him to you. Let him spend some time with you, she said gently, still holding me to herself.

Tamgbolo Sunju at the time was a lonely island, only three houses and four other male adults. The island was not bigger than a hectare of land, about the size of a football field; completely surrounded by water at high tide but adjoined to other swamps at low tide. It has a well light sand scape made bare at low tide and hidden at high tide. Every day at low tide, the foot prints of the men who call it their home are revealed on the sands and erased at high tide, leaving the memories only in the hearts and minds of the discerning and creative. Sometimes their foot prints show how many times they have been back and forth from their huts to their canoes. This was my new community, at least for now, so much beauty to behold and so inspiring: the nights crept in, in the plain glare and the mornings took over hurriedly, these are natural constants. The birds sang their usual songs unmindful of others; not even the five adults and one young adolescent on the island. The crickets would not give up their hold either, neither would the monkey at evening tide, this was a new experience even for the village boy.

Am, aam, ham - that is the leader of the congress - the Oldman once remarked - what congress? I asked, - the Oldman turned around and said to me with frank looks, the congress of Gorillas! No! I thought in my heart and then I

said; then we may be in danger! No, the Oldman replied, they are on the opposite island and it's far away from here, it is across the river. 'Do not worry my son, it is time to go and set our hooks' (vukuma). We both moved to the river side. I could see the crystal clear water revealing her contents, tiny fishes of various species, wagging their tails on the sand bank. Ah! Life is simple and beautiful when close to nature, and it is inspiring, or so I thought. And this marked the beginning of an intense but pleasant experience. Life has begun, days past, nights past, each day with its experience and so are the memories, rich and pleasant.

## 2

### The Community

There were no women in the community but once a while women came in small boats all by themselves and usually in the evenings or at weekends. For **Igupelebo**, these were the best times. When these women come, it was usual to see Igupelebo and **Chimpelebo** disappear into their huts. On one occasion, one of the women called me and gave me a gift of “pikiri ijapu and otutu fulo” that she brought with her. The Oldman was very happy that I was going to eat something different from the usual garri and ipiangba. He thanked her and directed me to give her two agbara fish and the dry ipoli we reserved in the okeli.

The Oldman would tell me “pray to God and let God’s presence show up in your everyday life” – Integrity and good character will always open doors, any door you knock because that is God’s nature.

One evening, a wet cold evening, the rain was still drizzling, the Old man felt cold and so we agreed that we will not go anywhere that evening. He had asked if my wife was pregnant, and I told him no, then he laughed and said “I also do not have a pregnant wife so let us rest”. And so it was, we gathered around the fire place to crush some dry corn mixed with oil and crayfish, ‘ye tokuru, ye pei okuma iku bere ow’, it was an interesting moment for me, as if we were having corn festival. Do not forget this he instructed; everything is changing so too you have to change and now is the time for you to plan, everything you need to deal with life is inside you. Great things require time and effort. You can always ask for help, but, “be strong enough to stand alone, smart enough to know when you need help, and brave enough to

ask for it" he continued, there is a reward on the other side of the challenge, in five, ten or twenty years, this will all be a distant memory. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning'', I looked at him as he said the last words, I knew it was from the Bible, but where in the bible I don't know. The message is coming as encouragement for my struggles to learn my new trade, it was not easy.

In one of our fishing expedition, the Oldman instructed me to catch crabs while he trims the atabaka for more vukuma, and so we both set out for our assignment. In his words; this is a division of labor and collaboration, he said whatever anybody could do for you, you should delegate so you can increase productivity. While I busied myself doing my assigned duty, I head the Oldman shout – Yawo! Tamuno e, Yei, I turned and saw him flung a black rag and running for safety – yawoto, obo dikiye. I hurried close and saw a snake, beautiful, glittering snake in black velvety colours also moving in the other direction. The snake was hiding in the rag and has just been disturbed by the Oldman. Snakes, rats, alligators, kites, hawks and eagles are also a regular feature in our community but they, like the human beings, all mind their business.

The Eagles are dear to the Oldman and whenever an eagle comes to site, the Oldman has praises for it and will say things like Alaigo, Amanyana feni, peri bate igo and igo feni, Igo piakha piakha. I had always thought about something special about the eagle in the Oldman's thoughts, but for me I see the eagle as just another hunter within the community

– hunting for other birds, reptiles, rats and fishes just as the hawks and the kites.

This particular evening as usual, we were seated around the fire roasting seasoned gbulu and deke that we caught while harvesting bait for the Vukuma. Harvesting bait was usually done with ojukuru or tibi nine bileme. The Oldman told the story of the eagle which he described as the king of birds and a personification of long life, strength and wisdom.

“The Eagle has the longest life-span of its species. It can live up to 70 years. But to reach this age, the eagle must make a very difficult decision. In its 40th year, the eagle’s long and flexible Talons can no longer grab a prey which serves as food. Its long and sharp beak becomes bent. Its old-aged and heavy wings, due to their thick feathers, stick to its chest and make it difficult to fly. At such times, the eagle is left with only two options: to die or go through a painful process of change. Which may last up to 150 days (5 months). The process requires the eagle to fly to a mountain top and sit on its nest. There the eagle knocks its beak against a rock until it plucks it out. Then the eagle will wait for the new beak to grow back after which it will pluck out its talons. When its talons grow back, the eagle starts plucking its old-aged feathers. And after this, the eagle takes its famous flight of rebirth and lives for 30 more years”.

In order to survive and live. We too have to start the change process. We sometimes need to get rid of the unpleasant old memories, negative habits, and our fixed mindset. Only when freed from the past burdens can we take advantage of the present and indeed, the future. Open up your mind my son, and let yourself fly high like an eagle, the Oldman said out loud.



"Pa," I called out looking in his eyes, "you know the Bible very well, why did you not join the clergy after you retired from service?" The Oldman laughed looking excited, he said, "My son, I will tell you something. Have you heard the story of Four Fishermen at the sea of Galilee? The fisherman is very close to the heart of Jesus Christ. When our Lord was going to start his earthly ministry, the first people he recruited as his assistants were fishermen. He met them while they were fishing and because of their chosen profession, competence, faith and enthusiasm he promoted them to fishers of men. So after now you too will be a fisher of men. You only have to believe and think in that direction and all it requires is to lead men and women to God by the life you live - a life of humility, dedication and service. You have to be a competent tradesman, of strong character and worthy of trust and performance excellence.

### 3

#### **The Experience**

During the odd water days (simingi or mingi si) as against the in-season (ibi mingi or koni mingi), usually, every one of us takes time out to sit in the Iguo wari and such evenings are always beautiful, looking across the river from the Iguo house at the water front. The Iguo Warri is the functional resemblance of the storm shelter houses in forest areas.

This is generally, a period when the fishermen rest to mend their tools and fishing equipment. Also, about this period, some people go to market to sell their catch for the last week, others go home to their villages on holidays or to visit friends and family members. The period ranges from konimingi oyi iniadiene (14th) up into sono diene (5<sup>th</sup> of the new circle), making a total of seven days. Konimingi sonio adiene (6th) is kulukulu ba while Sonoma diene (7th) is referred to as omo ba, oyiadiene is kopu ba, oyigboriene (11th) up until jiadiene (15th) is seriba in varying degrees. During the seriba, the water is usually bigger and floods the mangrove and some fishing islands, however Tamgbolo sonju is on a higher elevation and can hold back on the flood water.

On the traditional calendar, time and events are first measured in tides through ebbs and flows, night falls and day breaks, market days described by events or locations and then in water circles over a forth night (two weeks) or fifteen daily water circles. There is however, a fifteen minutes overlap or delay with each ebb and flow respectively. Every akalu mingi is preceded by a furu mingi. These are natural constants that repeat themselves over and over again making up two water circles in one Gregorian calendar month. There are however, those other fishermen whose season matures

when the water circle is odd. This group include the opu-ari kon apu, opu igbo koromapu and the chua bama igbo kon apu. These groups set their nets in the evening and harvest the nets in the morning hours, they too also make a comfortable living. Their catches are usually good, comprising of various types of fishes. I see them and we pass ourselves on the sea routes but there is also a laborious effort put into it though it is usually worth the troubles. This evening, we could see the opu-igbo fishermen setting their nets on the river, we were looking like spectators watching a game of fishermen on the river and the river spread out like a large football field with endless extremes. Each fisher folk in his position, every one of them were doing their best; the end of which is to make a living, to provide for their love ones and to be responsible men in their various society, we all belong here to make a living, a respectful and responsible life worthy of true gentlemen of Okrika and Ijaw descend. However watching from a distance makes me feel like I was on a different mission from theirs, I wished it was so.

Fishing is our hustle, it is what we do like many people in rural riverine areas, I am here fishing as a source of food, income and plan for the future. Some islands like Amamba Kiri has farmers growing crops like, cassava, and vegetables, the Oldman has remarked, also at Abaji Boko, the community collectively grows coconut. The soil though riverine has sustained it. Here in Tamgbolo Sunji; collecting water for domestic use was the most difficult task, we travel to Mingi du kiri or Opuojoma kiri, where the water is fresh. While at the island, I came closely and better understanding of the average routines of the remote riverine communities.

Boat maintenance: For those who rely on boats for transportation or fishing, regular maintenance is essential.

Food preservation: Preserving fish and other food items through smoking, drying, or fermenting is a common practice.

Household chores: Routine household tasks like cooking, cleaning, and collection of wood (sanga) are essential.

Trading: Some residents engage in trading, selling goods like fish, farm produce, or crafts at local markets.

Net mending: Fishermen often need to mend their nets to ensure they remain effective for fishing.

Canoe paddling: For those who rely on canoes for transportation, paddling is a regular task.

Environment and house maintenance: Maintaining farm plots, including clearing, planting, and harvesting, is a crucial task, working on the thatch as is usually the case was also very essential. These tasks are often performed manually or with simple tools, and may vary depending on the specific community and their traditions.

#### 4

#### **Snake Pepper Soup**

On this day, a snake was discovered in the pile of woods Imopelebo has stacked for drying. The scene upset everyone, especially Imopelebo, the woman who has come to buy the wood and the boat man that came with her. On hearing their shout of snake! snake! snake! I sprang out of my tent and ran out of our hut with a log of wood in my hand which I flung at the snake, and I was lucky to prevent the snake from escaping. My log of wood hit the snake against another wood as it was trying to escape, it could not run again and then with a second throw of another wooden log, I picked a handy wood (tene) and gave three wipes, as the snake struggled for life. The snake was stopped completely yet I gave additional wipes in quick succession until I had Imopelebo and the boatman shout ok! ok! for me to stop wiping.

I feel the fear in Imopelebo and the discouragement of the woman who wanted to buy the wood, so I volunteered to help load the sticks into the woman's boat, not minding weather there could be another snake in the stack. Everyone was happy and Imopelebo prayed out loud for me when the woman finally left with the woods, everyone, indeed was happy. Imopelebo was so excited, he prayed out loud again and again. He shouted, jei oputamuno sisi be tokube belema, okubie tonye goye goye birima opiri. nemi se ni opiri, o' lolo, miebaka tomikiri teme kini nyana oputamuno. Amada opuso, miebaka gbamaso. Amen!!!!, everyone shouted.

That evening Imopelebo, Chinpelebo and Igusokubo had a good meal from the snake. The soup smelled fine and for a small island with barely four huts, every one of us felt the

sensation. Iyo, gbin gbarika, Omu alabo, iyo, iyo, gbinbo, omugbinbo!!! I heard Chinpelebo call out. I kept quiet even though I was looking in his direction. Never have I been so called before, it is not a name to be ascribed to me because I killed a snake, or so I thought, at that instant. Iyo eh, are you not hearing me! Chinpelebo shouted at me. Surprised I asked if he is talking to me. Yes he said. Waving at me to come over to his hut. The pepper soup is ready he said. I was looking warm and then I heard “my son”, so I quickly excused them and walked away. In my head I understood the message, the Oldman does not want me to join in the meal. When I approached the Oldman, he was reading the Bible and reading it loud. Sir! I called out, here am I, you called me. The Oldman turned and then he said “prepare the boat so we can go and get some bait to set our hooks.” And then he turned and continued reading out loud “..... but this is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit and .....”. I could see that he was reading from the book of Isaiah. When I left the Oldman’s presence, I went straight to the boat to bail the small water collected in the boat from the waves , this is the normal practices , then I went back to the hut and collected the rest of the item. I could observed more fishermen had taken their positions on the river filed.

The Oldman’s word, Aru kara karama means to prepare the boat and load the tools and gadgets required. Collecting bait is a night adventure and would require the under listed; three paddle, machetes, spear, various nets including the; ingi du igbo (scoop net) and ongoro (drag net), the wind sail or ivalla, the two boxes containing the hooks, the cast net also called akpaigbo and the sticks especially prepared for the

Vukuma. The expedition could sometimes go beyond the night so, the Oldman would advise to also include; drinking water, cup, plate, garri, fire grail or buroh, knife, spices container, mosquitos repellant, local gin, matches, dry ashes, kerosene, chewing stick, and the two lambs. I completed the preparation, quenched some of the fire in the hut and waited in the boat for the Oldman. He usually comes to the canoe with his purse, radio, machete and a bottle containing hooks. His small machete is specially sharpened but the only time I had seen him use it was to split chewing stick for me in the morning. As we set out I could see more and more fisher folks taking their positions on the river. Yet they were some heading northwards against the evening wind while we were heading southward from our island. The evening was adventurous for me and as usual, there was so much fish to roast, selected from among the baits - which are usually Tilapia, or omoda and Mullet or deke, and garri to drink after we set the hooks.

5

### The Message

This evening, as we watch the fishermen appear to take their positions on the river field, Chinpelebo and Imopelebo told the story of the snake and the scene that followed, as if I was not present. I laughed; indeed, I laugh out loud and even heard my self-laughing. But I was not laughing at the scene they were describing or the bravery they seem to ascribe to me. The scene of the snake reminded me of the Oldman's encounter with the black velvety snake in one of our adventures, that day we were helpless, miserable and weary because we were unable to identify the where about of that snake, though smaller in size, the Oldman and I were afraid and we hurriedly left the site, we were discouraged and demotivated to do anything further. We left thanking the creator we were not hurt physically.

Imopelebo is not given too much talking when the Oldman is around us in the iguo. He also tells interesting stories from his own experience of life. He tells stories about the civil war, the Okrika and kalabari community clashes and the Okrika and Eleme crisis. He tells the stories with intermittent prayers – Tamuno bari dukuma – God don't let these things happen again.

I have heard about these stories in the past but Imopelebo tells the stories with immeasurable strength and confidence, such that you cannot fault that he is a first-hand witness. Once, while in the iguo with Igusokubo, he asked if I know the creepy whitish creatures in the split wood he brought ashore. I said no, so he told us a brief about the creatures, which he called Ototoloba, the semblance of wood worm.



He went on to tell the story of Ototoloba and the beautiful bride who rejected all the possible suitors, such that the men folk were infuriated by her pride and disrespect, so Ototoloba, a total stranger decided to borrow everything that will make him a gentleman including a royal gown also known as dona, hat, pipe and umbrella. He told us how the creature took the bride captive to the surprise of everyone. It was only the Owoioboko also described as the cockrel that rescued the bride and that is the reason the cockrel perks on the wood worms. He gave the moral of the story as:

First, the devil you know is better than the angel you do not know, suggesting that it is better to stick with what you know and understand, rather than taking a risk on something or someone unknown. Secondly, that women should investigate the people they choose to love, implying that; caution and discernment are essential when entering into romantic relationships and thirdly, looking beyond surface-level attributes and being carried away with flashy ornaments and money. Furthermore, Imopelebo highlighted the importance of focusing on the character and qualities of things and potential business and social partners.

We all listened to Imopelebo with rapt attention, including the Oldman, as he told his stories and emphasized on the morals behind them, quietly I looked at Imopelebo's physic: A very dark man of about 5'10" to 6'1" with a lean and athletic build, his facial features expresses a well chiseled jawline, prominent cheekbones, and a straight nose. He has thick, dark hair, that's well-groomed and styled even in that lonely island. In all, Imopelebo's irresistible physic is complimented with his bright, expressive eyes that sparkle with warmth and intelligence. Smooth, healthy-looking skin

with a subtle glow made conspicuous by his charming, confident smile. Though not a man of many words, but his laughter is great and when he does laugh, he shows off straight, white teeth enveloped in black rimmed red lips. Imopelebo has a sense of style that is put-together and polished, with a mix of classic and modern elements. His confidence like all else, an air that comes from being comfortable in his own skin. Like him, everything about him stands out, he owns the biggest boat also referred as Imoseinaru, paddle described as Dukonijoin, and drag stick described as Chunna, on the island. I remember, the Oldman had once described Imopelebo's palms as the palm of a craftsman, and the boat as fit for his kind of trade. "We are fishermen, we do not need such boats and beside we don't have strength to pull those boats" he would say to me.

For the Oldman, Imopelebo is very strong, skillful, knowledgeable and patient, because his trade requires such. He has to first identify an old red mangrove tree, plan how to fall it, fall it in the right and preferred direction and gradually split it into pieces. He will then wait until the right time in terms of tide, wind and water levels to gradually evacuate the large splitters which he may further split depending on his customers demand. Not many people are involved in that trade but almost everyone needs him to build their houses and fish alters.

After some moments of silence as usual, the Oldman said, the world is changing, he needs to change his style, and readapt otherwise two things will render him unproductive. What and what I asked quietly. Ah, the Oldman said. He himself, his health and the changing technologies in society, he is getting old by the day, he cannot do this work in five

more years. It's a very hard work my son. We both kept quiet but a message has been passed except that Imopelebo did not get it, I got it.

6**The Rules**

In our earlier meeting the Oldman had debriefed me on the facilities in the island, the Iguo house, the male toilet and bathing corner, the female toilet and bathing corner, and a sacred section where inhabitants of the island are not to cut wood.

“It is an all-male circle and you may be the youngest”, the Oldman informed me. He also told me ten key survival strategy for the life of a fisherman which includes;

1. To have an understanding of time, tides and days and to be able to forecast the time and tide on a future date. He said the life and activities of the average fisherman depends on this rule. The understanding of this rule make some folks look smarter than others.
2. Study and understand wind direction, clouds, and sea routes, as to enable you a set of choices and safe routes. This will enable you predict likely fish trails as you travel through these routes, to arm yourself and most importantly preserve energy and time on expeditions.
3. Always keep the boat tidy, neat, and properly maintained, the state of your boat will define your respect and value among other things within your peers. Make available everything you will need on any trip in your boat including an extra anchor, mosquitos repellent and water bailer. An extra bailer in your possession could make you a hero because you never can tell who will need it.
4. Maintain your gadgets and tools, set the hooks, nets, weaved bamboo mats; carefully, neatly and each in its

rightful position and order. Your surrounding should tell your story.

5. Prepare for tomorrow's expedition today, prepare and make a mental travel trip with positive outcomes even before you actually set out. Always outline an alternative plan and safety land marks in the case of long distance expeditions.
6. To go to bed early and manage sleep rightly. The Oldman agrees that sleep is a natural phenomenon but he believes that people should control sleep so that it does not mesmerized the individual. He told me to have enough sleep in my every day activity bank so I will be able to withdraw energy to keep me awake at such period of other extended activities and at such time when I am required not to sleep.
7. To always listen attentively, understand and ask questions on anything I find difficult or don't understand. In the Oldmans words; a person who does not ask questions will pitch tent on an unmarked grave. Ask with humility and ask with sincerity of purpose.
8. To always be good to others as much as my health, wealth and time can accommodate, you never know, it will come back to you in various other ways.
9. To never forget those who offend or despise you and those you wrong in any way, find a settlement as soon as possible, apologize if need be, forgive where necessary but never forget; those you offend will wait to take vengeance on you and those that offend you will come back to take another advantage on you. You have to be guided and live peaceable where ever you find yourself, as not to live in fear.

10. To believe in God, be prayerful and have positive hope that all will be well. Your believe should not matter in your relationship with people, especially people of other faith, the Oldman cautioned, but your behaviour and conduct in all circumstances should count. A persons believes does not make him or her a good person or better than others. Kindness and humility are expressed in action and conduct.

These rules were the first rules I was given at our meeting and with each passing day, the rules have come to play out naturally.

## 7

### **Call for Discipline**

On this day, like all other rest days, we all sat in the iguo, looking across the river to the other side which is referred to as *namasibi* in Kalabari *ijaw* language and *etebi* in Okrika *ijaw* language. And so it was, Chinpelebo told us that he is planning to marry one of the women that use to visit and that he will move over to Port Harcourt when that happens. Naturally, he expected comments from the Oldman so he poked him and said, Sir! Sir! What will you have to advise me? And then he laughed out loud. The Oldman was reluctant to speak, we all could see him trying to organize himself, after some moments of silence, and then, the Oldman cleared his throat and spoke out. He spoke with an impression as if to express himself for Chimpelebo and for the rest of us. “Listen here my friends”, the Oldman said, first, pointing at Chinpelebo, go look for God and pray for the right wife but before you marry take to heart these things I will tell you. The Oldman raised his two hands and said, first note this five things;

Firstly, you have to have personal development plan, be sure of what you want to do, whatever it is, business, work, or this stick you are cutting. After that you have to ensure that whatever you have chosen to do is secure, consistent and sustainable to maintain and service a family. You have not learnt anything, even with your diploma. The Oldman pointed at Chimpelebo; you have to work on your attitude.

1. Financial stability: Establish a stable career, manage debt, and build savings.
2. Emotional maturity: Develop self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution skills.

3. Independence: Establish a sense of identity and independence before merging lives.

Secondly, relationship preparation, this Marriage thing, responsible marriage! the Oldman said, is not for children.

You must learn these three things;

1. Communication: Develop effective communication skills to navigate conflicts and build a strong connection.
2. Trust and honesty: Establish trust and honesty in the relationship, and prioritize transparency.
3. Shared values and goals: Ensure compatibility in values, goals, and lifestyle.

Thirdly, you should have your own place where ever you want to stay, save money to make the necessary payments. I will give you three practical Considerations:

1. Financial planning: Discuss and plan for joint finances, expenses, and long-term financial goals.
2. Living arrangements: Consider housing, location, and lifestyle implications.
3. Family planning: Discuss and agree on family planning, parenting styles, and expectations.

Fourthly, understand the commitment and the responsibilities, save money to make the necessary payments, don't go and pregnant a woman and then look up to your parents and uncles and later tag them as wicked people. Chinpelebo shrugged his shoulders, murmuring as of rejection of what the Oldman has said.

1. Understand the commitment: Recognize the lifelong commitment and responsibilities that come with marriage.
2. Willingness to compromise: Develop a willingness to compromise, forgive, and work through challenges together.



3. Support and teamwork: Prioritize mutual support, teamwork, and collaboration in the relationship.

Finally, the Oldman said, the life here is not what I will recommend for you but if you are considering here as a temporary place to raise a family, then you have to own a hut. Chimpelebo was quiet, we, all of us, the rest of us also, kept quiet as we listened to the Oldman. And you must make these considerations, the Oldman continued:

1. Meet the family: Get to know each other's families and understand their dynamics.
  2. Discuss expectations: Openly discuss expectations, boundaries, and desires.
  3. Seek counseling: Consider premarital counseling to address potential issues and strengthen the relationship.
- Ultimately, every individual is unique, and what works for one person may not work for another. It's essential to have open and honest discussions with your partner and prioritize building a strong foundation for a healthy and fulfilling marriage.

Chimpelebo stammered and said “all my mates are married, some have children, I want to marry too” his voice slowed down as if he was going to cry. I hear you, the Oldman said, but listen here, everything has time and season and life race is not to the swift or the strong but of God who's approval no man can challenge. It is ok to marry but marry a woman that has good home training, who will understand you, respect you and assist you as a partner and friend.

There was silence, absolute silence, until Igusokubo broke the quietness, Opuada, imiete (thank you) he said with appreciation. Thank you (mie baka Opuada), Imopelebo said, repeating after Igusokubo and looking at the Oldman.

He then turned and said sarcastically, yedawo, yedawo, yedawo, he continued, karakaraye dawo, Ibianga bara, miegbeinaye, buosi bara na ibi dumo na, pointing at Chinpelebo and laughing out loud as is characteristic of him, Again, Igusokubo cut-in, before you marry reflect on yourself and see if you are matured enough and have capacity to show compassion, be benevolent, and be of humane understanding, of gratitude, integrity, excellence and compassion for others. He concluded.

The Oldman rose up from his chair and signaled me to join him in our hut, while we both prepare, the Oldman murmured some prayers, almighty and most merciful father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep..... Amen. Amen. Amen, I repeated after him. I carried my cardigan, an old semi disused woolly material, the Oldman gave me to prevent cold and wind while at sea. The cardigan had been very useful. I walked to the boat and sat there waiting for the Oldman. I can see Chinpelebo, his face still hungry for more advice from the Oldman.

Iyo, Iyobe, Iyo oh, Imopelebo called out – I looked up and he showed me my Diary, holding it high for me to see. He has it. Ok, I nodded, keep it well for me please I shouted back.

8**The Inspirations**

When I walked into the Iguo, there were others with Chimpelebo, but they were clearly visitors who are just taking shade from the rain. I did the usual greetings and sat beside Chinpelebo. Despite our age differences, we pally and do some things together, we play Drought, and Scrabbles when I am free and also have great conversations. He is a young man in his Mid-thirties, slim, fair, hairy and thickly bearded, He talks fast and in most of his quiet times is calculating money – abstract figures, money that he has earned, monies which is owed him and so much money that does not show in his physical appearance. Chimpelebo told me he sponsored himself through university education and at the time was waiting for call up to the national Youth Service Corps Program (NYSC). Also, in a conversation, he had once told me not to have an expectation that anybody can disrespect me and that respect is mutual. Respect yourself and respect others, nobody will disrespect you no matter what you do for a living – and if anybody does, it is the person's problem. All you have to do is just be sure what you are doing is lawful and morally upright and it makes you happy. Chimpelebo comes to me as an intelligent young man, an older brother to identify with. He taught me a few other things that I have always reflected on since then.

Once, after an argument with Igusokubo, Chimpelebo turned to me and said, “if something does not make sense, then it does not, it does not matter who said it. Whether an Oldman or a small boy, avoid hero worship but learn from their experience. Read, read, he emphasized, read biographical books, and listen to folk laws, there will always be moral

lessons to learn or lesson learnt from mistakes. You don't have to show off, he continued but you have to prove you know somethings.

Chimpelebo believes that the best brains work in super industries, so to work in the super industries or in the top scale of high profile industries you must train to be a super professional, in attitude, knowledge, and emotion, and also in conduct. He explained that as soon as he comes back from Youth Service, he will enroll with the institute of Chartered Accountants (ICAN). He will do the required examinations and be chartered. Iyo e, my eyes are on the international accounting certifications, he said out loud.

Iyo eh, this life is all yours and this time is all you have, do not give up to limitations. You have to try, try and keep trying. Think of an idea and decide what you want for the rest of your life. Ah, ah, ah – he cleared his throat, and then said; in the future we will be the people who will make decisions, so we have to acquire knowledge that will enable us make decisions and proof that the decisions are right and very well beyond measures.

We must be educated so our decisions can be trusted, with demonstrable commitment, and excellence in implementation and performance.

Although, here in Tamgbolo Sunju, he is just a wood cutter and a mean one at that, in his heart and expressions Chimpelebo has proved to me, he is educated, knows his onions and prepared to climb up the ladder of top level workers, his words come very strong and encouraging to me. I like his company but there is something the Oldman does not like about him. The Oldman thinks Chimpelebo flirts with women, some of them looking like married women and

others seemingly too young to sleep with for a man in his thirties, yet even the Oldman agrees that Chimpelebo, so far, is a success but he has to change his attitude and be more prudent with life – The Oldman once reprimanded him. I play Scrabble, which was popular among my age group, but I did not understand it the way Chinpelebo explained it to me. Given his words, Scrabble is a popular board game that challenges players to create words from letter tiles, scoring points are based on letter values and word placement. It is a game that promotes vocabulary, strategic thinking, and cognitive skills. Playing Scrabble helps the participants expand their vocabulary and improve their linguistic skills. The players need to think strategically about word placement, tile management, and point optimization in addition to improvements in cognitive skills such as memory, attention, and problem-solving. While I have played the game for the fun of it, Chinpelebo explained for me, the social benefits of playing Scrabble including opportunities for social interaction, building relationships and community. However, like every learning activity, the game requires, regular practice, learning new words and interaction with others for continued improvement.

2**The Sermon**

Igusokubo is probably the oldest on the island but he was economical with everything and his appearance comes to me as if he is feeling pains always. He does not talk much, does not laugh and often times he was in his hut sleeping, whenever he is on the island. Almost every time the Oldman and I come back from fishing, the Oldman will direct me to deliver fish for him to cook. The Oldman and Igusokubo had known a long time ago and share mutual respect and understanding.

On this particular day, Igusokubo spoke extensively in contribution to the discussion. Two things he said, stuck with me since then. Firstly, he told us that the best couples usually do not have the same character, they just have the same understanding of the most important things and the things that matter. They share common understanding on the things they see, desire, feel and experience. These couples are just mindful of themselves and their partners, they love themselves and they care for each other. Everyone wants a beautiful woman or handsome man; someone that is self-motivated, good mannered and has some means of livelihood, especially if a man. Women will prefer some social status, good education and good job. They want to be protected, listened to and cared for always and that is the spirit and letter as marriages should be. However, Igusokubo believes that wealth and status in society should not limit anybody from finding happiness and fulfilment. He believes that God takes care of his own.

Secondly, He told the story of Jesus Christ at the marriage Ceremony in Cana of Galilee and the miracle of turning

water into wine. The wedding ran out of wine, which was a significant embarrassment for the hosting family in ancient Jewish culture so, Mary, Jesus mother informed Jesus about the shortage, and he replied, "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come." However, Mary instructed the servants to follow Jesus' instructions, and he ordered them to fill six stone jars with water, each holding 20-30 gallons. Jesus then told the servants to draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet, who was unaware of the miracle. And when the master tasted the water-turned-wine, he was astonished by its quality, so much that he remarked that the best wine was usually served first, but the hosts had saved the best for last.

In the hearts and minds of all who believe and patiently wait. God's timing is knitted in wisdom and neatly wrapped in his son Jesus Christ, so that those who believe may find a reason to celebrate themselves in praise of God's goodness and mercy, he said gently, as we all listened.

Chinpelebo, though was working on his machette also listened with absorbed attention and quietness. What is expected from all of us is to believe, trust, obey, work, and have faith and patience. He managed a mild laugh and said "Chinpelebo you are very hard working but you need to be wise, and sociable. Chinpelebo, you don't have good manners. You have come very far by acquiring education, but if you want to find good job and excel in it, then you must work on yourself. You must nurture good habits that will help you and put you in favor with anybody that can help you. Igusokubo cracked his fingers, as he spoke, I believe in divine favor, but a person has to be ready so as not

to miss the chance when opportunity shows up, he concluded.

The Oldman sat up straight, stretched himself and said, minapu, oye awari suo, (my people thank you very much, let me leave for my hut) He got up and everyone joined leaving only me and Chinpelebo.

While we were still reminiscing on the evening discusses, a boat came containing three persons two of whom are youths about my age and a middle aged man, probably in his mid-sixties, and clearly looks the team lead. He was massive in my eyes especially his stomach yet tall, fair and heavily greyed. Chinpelebo announced that the team lead is Elder Ockiya, commonly referred to as Lejigbobo in the community. He is a regular member of the community but I was meeting him for the first time. The Oldman had earlier told me about Mr Ockiya, whom he spoke so well about, during their days in service and referred to him as being a strong man, very disciplined, courageous and brave. Mr Ockiya and the Oldman spent a good part of the night in the Igua, discussing and clasping mosquitoes until late in the night. Son, the Oldman called out, and as usual I shouted back; Sir. Mr Ockiya is around, he will sleep in the other bed while his men will sleep in Chinpelebo's hut, very early tomorrow morning, they will check their nets and move on.



## 10

### **The Encouragement**

On one Sunday afternoon, I have sat in the **Iguo** – common place for the community – alone for the last 60 minutes or so before I was joined by my host. The old man walked in with pen and paper in his hands. “What does he want to do?” I thought within me. “Son!” He shouted out, “Go and bring the Bible from our hut and check if **Imopelebo** and **Chinpelebo** are awake”. I came back after a few minutes and handed him the bible. “They are still sleeping” I said. “Okay, thank you” he responded. “My son” he called out again, he then kept silent. This got me curious on what he wanted to say. “Is **Ogbokoro** your father?” he asked, I nodded in affirmative – another moment of silence. “And **Laban the DC** is your father?” he continued, “my grandfather Sir”, I said. After a little silence, he proceeded “both your father and grandfather were prominent within their cycles, they were great men, knowledgeable men and wealthy in their own right as fishermen”. The Old man looked in my direction as I struggle in cheer and pride, knowing my forbearers were great men. Have you heard about Chief Golden Somiari Nangibo and Hon. Josiah Fred Jamabo, anyway they are both from Ogoloma and have represented Wakirike bese in various ways. They represent the best of us and they are your relatives. One is a lawyer and the other is a Pharmacist. Have you met them before? Yes, I responded, Hon. Josiah Jamabo is my mother’s uncle and he is very intimate with my grandfather.

“My son” the old man said, “times have changed, times have changed, you don’t belong here, not to this life we live here. When you go back home, go to school, register for exams

and read your books or learn a trade, a modern trade. Everything is not taught in school but school will give you a window and sufficient skill set to learn on your own, special skills that will sustain you and support you the rest of your life – those skills are called life skills and includes; skills for becoming a successful gentleman and for living a more interesting life, the dream life anyone will wish for, a life of sufficiency and freedom. The future belongs to the prepared mind – invest time and efforts in your future. Help will come your way if you set your mind and work hard. If you work harder, intelligently and smarter, you will get luckier”. The Old man continued “I know a few men in your town”, they are prominent people and highly placed in society, they are your brothers and relatives – work hard and be like them. They are all great achievers and some of them are chiefs and they are growing old, soon they will be weak and will count on the strength of youths like you”. I know Benjamin Alamina, he is a Surveyor and a Lawyer and also has a very big house in Ogoloma, I said.

I kept quiet as the Old man continued but he has already set my mind in motion – random motion. “Go back to school and become a teacher, that way so many doors will be opened, if and only if you continue to develop yourself”. “Why teacher Sir?” I asked. There was his usual period of silence followed by laughter. “Teachers learn continuously and are inspiring to many people, but most importantly they are disciplined, have time for their families and are highly regarded by society. For your temperament, you will make a good teacher and community leader”.

While he spoke, I was lost in my thoughts;

- Go to school, read your books and register for a higher certificate
- Get a job or something to keep body and soul together while you continuously improve yourself
- Learn a trade, a special trade that will serve people's needs.
- You don't belong here, this is not the promise for you, times have changed and will continue to change
- You deserve honor and respect in future
- You have to give back to society through service to mankind
- Now is the time to set the agenda for yourself and to determine the life you want to live

Then I heard the voice of Imopelebo and looked up at him. "Good afternoon father and son, what are you people talking about?" Imopelebo cut in, and that was the end of the discussion – the end of our private session regrettable. Although, the discussion ended but the message has ever since been processed continuously.

## II

### **Bittersweet**

One evening, about the fifth day in the fourth week of our stay together, the Oldman and I sat around the fire, watching over the fishes we were drying, the fishes that we had captured that day. The weather was cold and as usual, we prepared pulo garri and samina ipoli, this was the Oldman's favourite. I don't eat much of it, I rather prefer drinking garri, but that evening the Oldman advised me not to drink garri, but that I should cook gorogoro and eat sugari, he choose to eat the pulo garri. While I was waiting for the soup beside the fire, the Oldman called out "my son", pa! I answered. I want to know if you know. I looked up with a rapped attention to hear him.

Do you know Chief Ruskin Ofokome ?

Yes, I answered, Chief Ruskin is my uncle, he is a lawyer.

Ok, the Oldman said. Do you know Chief Evans Awoala?

Yes sir, I answered, I have met him when he was a commissioner in the Rivers State Ministry of Education while I was a student at Government Comprehensive Secondary School at Borokiri,

Ok, the Oldman said again. Then he thought in silence for some minutes and he asked again, do you know Chief Adolfus Jamabo? Ogulacha? Alalibo?.

Yes I nodded in the affirmative, all three are my relatives.

What about Chief Ngeri Rowland, no, I shook my head.

Do you know Chief Abraham of Bolo town? Yes sir I said, where? Have you met him before?

Yes Sir, Chief Abraham was my principal in secondary school.

Where? at comprehensive? ok. He was at Okrika Gramer School too.

Have you met Chief Alatoru and chief Promise Ikpuku.

Yes, I said as we both burst into laughter.

Ok. It is good that you know these people. I want you to draw inspiration from them. You have to grow up and be like them at least, that way you will impact the society.

Check your soup and eat something. We will set out early tomorrow morning.

What time I asked.

Set the alarm for 4:45, we will set out latest 5 am if it does not rain.

Ok sir. I said, as I watched the Oldman hum some hymn lyrics, it was all familiar to me;

The Oldman is a man of hymns, every night he will murmur a hymn and sometimes sing aloud especially on our way back from an expedition. He reads the Bible every day and most times he engage the rest of us in a Bible related conversation. He tells stories from the Bible, and translate verses into Kalabari or Okrika language. The Old man's English is as fluent as his Okrika and Kalabari languages, he believes that if a person reads and understands a Bible verse then the person should also be able to tell his understanding in his mother tongue or simpler language description. The Oldman sings his favorite hymns; A & M 270 and 250 in both English and in Okrika languages.

The Oldman advised that I should be of a pleasant attitude, healthy psychic and a good listener, that way you will be respected by your enemies and loved by your friends. My Son, the old man said, always repay trust with excellence and higher value.

When you are given a place of trust, whatever it is, you must prove yourself and raise your value. Our time together is limited but your life is just beginning. Let the Joy of the Lord be your strength. Whatever is good, pleasing and noble, that should be your watch word. The Oldman told the story of Jesus Christ and the four fishermen at the sea of Galilee. I could see that the evening is far spent in the Oldman as he yawns; learn leadership skills by being a trusted follower, he said, learn a trade to be entrepreneurial and be seen through good communication and persuasion. No one succeeds except through perseverance and good presentation, but also remember self-preservation and survival. I have a few books I should have allowed you to read, but let me not pressure your youthful mind.

You can fail at what you don't want to do, you can still be a fisherman even if you are well educated but you cannot be educated if you miss spent this time, your youth fishing and the prospects of a better life that comes with education may be missed forever. So you should as well take a chance at doing something that you love, which is hard, now that you are in your youth.

For the rest of the evening, I reflected on the Oldman's words, thoughts on what to do, I could feel a new adult rising in me, and then fear of failure, I realize that fear has ruled most of my life and stopped me from truly living my potentials, fear of not being good enough, not sure of the next meal, of repeatedly requesting for assistance with books to read, cloths to wear, and now going to the university. No, I thought aloud.

Although I am only nineteen, and live with my mother, I must go back to school. If only I can get a job. I really want

to go to university and chase my dream, to try and become something, to be a useful member of the society. I want to have faith that something bigger exists out there and that even if it's to teach in secondary school, I will impact the society. Yes a role does exist for me. If I just take that first step, that first leap of faith, whole new possibilities are waiting for me, I thought. I don't want to be a coward that is scared to live the life that I want to live. Deep in my inside, I thanked God, for the opportunity to have met the Oldman, I have to try a new strategy, but first, I want to try not being afraid of life's outcomes any more.

## 12

### **Contemplation**

The day of departure finally arrived, and with it, a mix of emotions and anticipation for the new chapter that lay ahead. The night before had been a long and contemplative one, filled with thoughts of the life that was about to unfold. As the morning sun rose, the excitement and anxiety of embarking on a new journey became palpable. With a note in pocket and a set of instructions that would serve as a guiding light, I did set out on a path that would be shaped by the wisdom imparted by my mentor - Opuada as he is called by everyone in the community. The parting words of the Oldman, infused with wisdom and a deep understanding of life's intricacies, would become the cornerstone of my life's journey. The advice given was not just a farewell gesture but a blueprint for living a life of purpose, integrity, and excellence. Four key principles emerged from the Oldman's guidance which were essential for living a purposeful and fulfilling life.

#### **Repaying Trust with Excellence:**

This principle emphasizes the importance of demonstrating high standards and exceptional performance in roles of trust. It's about being reliable, hardworking, and committed to excellence in all aspects of life.

#### **Adding Value:**

Continuously improving and contributing positively to one's position or responsibility is crucial. This principle helps individuals make a meaningful impact, achieve personal growth, and enhance their capabilities.



### Keep Faith and Joy:

Finding strength and guidance in one's faith and letting joy be a driving force in life's pursuits is vital. This principle highlights the importance of spiritual grounding and the role of joy in motivating and fulfilling one's endeavors.

### Pursuing what is Good, Pleasing, and Noble:

Setting a high moral and ethical standard for oneself is essential. This principle guides individuals to make decisions and take actions that are beneficial to themselves and others, reflecting a life of integrity and virtue.

In today's fast-paced and complex world, it is easy to get lost in the chaos and struggle to find purpose and fulfillment. However, by applying certain principles and strategies, individuals can cultivate a life of meaning, integrity, and deep satisfaction. The principles of Setting High Standards, Continuous Learning and Improvements, Finding Joy in Your Endeavors, Living with Integrity, Cultivating Gratitude, and Empowering Others are essential for navigating life's complexities with purpose and integrity.

By applying these principles, individuals can:

- Set High Standards: Strive for excellence in all aspects of life, whether personal or professional. This involves setting clear goals, working hard, and persevering through challenges.
- Continuously Learn and Improve: Seek opportunities for growth and development, embracing challenges as opportunities to learn and enhance one's capabilities. This

involves being open to new experiences, seeking feedback, and being willing to adapt to changing circumstances.

- Find Joy in Your Endeavors: Let passion and joy drive one's pursuits, finding fulfillment in the process and outcome of one's efforts. This involves identifying one's strengths and interests and pursuing activities that bring happiness and satisfaction.

- Live with Integrity: Align one's actions and decisions with one's values and principles, ensuring a life of consistency, reliability, and ethical behavior. This involves being honest, trustworthy, and responsible in all aspects of life.

- Cultivate Gratitude: Focus on the positive aspects of one's life, practicing gratitude to shift one's perspective and attract more positivity. This involves recognizing the good things in life, expressing appreciation, and focusing on the present moment.

- Empower Others: Share one's time, resources, and skills to make a positive impact on others' lives, bringing fulfillment and purpose to one's own life. This involves being generous, supportive, and kind to others, and recognizing the value of community and connection. By embracing these principles, individuals can experience a range of benefits, including increased confidence and self-esteem, improved relationships and communication, enhanced personal and professional growth, and a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment.

In conclusion, applying the principles of Setting High Standards, Continuous Learning and Improvements, Finding Joy in Your Endeavors, Living with Integrity, Cultivating Gratitude, and Empowering Others can lead to a life of purpose, integrity, and deep fulfillment.

### 13

#### The Quintessential Visitors

The old man had a radio cassette player which never stops talking; it's batteries are arranged in a small wooden box; Igupelebo had referred to it as Opuada's Battery House. The radio was supposed to use only the four batteries but probably because of the frequency of the replacements the old man created the box. On such days when we are not very busy the old man plays a lot of highlife music and one of the most interesting is Rex Lawson music, and then he will sing along with it. He will talk about other highlife musicians and then he will tell some story about Rex Lawson's innovations and skillful approach to music. He praises Rex Lawson for bringing Kalabari and the Ijaws to limelight in the early 70s through music. When an interesting news reaches us through the radio, he will sing. When the news is not favorable to his understanding or mood; he will still sing. Once there was a report about a boat mishap in which many people lost their lives, when we had it, the Old man shouted, Oputamuno iyanaboe, and then after some period of silence he murmured, 'Omu ye bi mina ama bie buaye bero o' indeed it was one of Rex Lawson's songs.

And so it is, every time there are visitors, the Oldman will engage them in discussions to know what is happening in the home front, depending on where the visitor has come from that moment and the visitors' home town.

There are many visitors to the island, each with his or her purpose. There are the women, the traders and also the medicine men. One notable man was a slim, tall, dark man with a very conspicuous accent that clearly shows he must be of the Nembe or Western Ijaw stock. The Old man

described him as Arukababo. He was more regular at Tamgbolo Sunju than all the other trading visitors. In actual sense he was a herbalist. About every three days, he brings herbs in bottles and clay pots for his patients who live along the sea roots. He also supplies the gin we all drink. At such visits, Chinpelebo and Igusokubo collect something from him - herbs mixed in gin. Imopelebo take extra - a clay pot filled with herbs which he boils to drink and for steam bath. On this particular day, the Oldman called me and told me that the man was from an area after Nembe, and that he came to this area as a canoe carver and has been around for over 20 years. When his strength started failing him he learnt a new trade and over the years, he has improved himself as a medicine man and future teller. He has in the course of time helped a lot of men by telling them their future life. The man has powers to remove charms from land and boats. I listened as the Oldman told me about the works of the Arukarabo. He has to change his trade fast because there are not many trees to carve boats around here and with the way things are going, someday we will use boats made with plastics and fiber as fishing boats. Well! the Oldman paused with a smile on his face, his new trade is putting food on his table.

The Oldman peeped through the thatch window and called out, Iyo'o, Arukarabo, please come when you are finished with Imopelebo. He turned to me and said, the man can look at your palm and tell your ailment and the treatment. He can remove poison and also give amulets that can remove charms and evils but I don't trust him. His gins and herbs work but the divinity is what I don't believe. The Oldman held my hand and led me to the Igua where Chinpelebo and Igusokubo are with the Arukarabo. We sat down and the

Oldman and everyone exchanged greetings, as usual, there were herbs in the boat, gin bottles and all manner of wraps, calabash and dried bush meet, it all can be seen from the Iguo. Arukarabo walked to his boat and then came and gave some herbs to the Oldman after looking at his palm and eyes. The Oldman then asked him to look at my palms. Arukarabo held my palms left to left and right to right. He shook my palms, silently, examined my hands, looked in my eyes and said this child is fine, he does not have pains. He then asked the Oldman if he wanted him to wash my hands. The Oldman looked in my direction but I feigned innocence, pretending not to hear, after all, I don't even understand. Arukarabo brought out a small bowl from his bag, added clean water from a jerrycan he was carrying on him and spoke a few words. Then he looked in my eyes, looked at my palms, released my palms and said "Ya, ya, ya." Everyone looked at him in silence. Arukarabo looked at the sky, he looked at the waterfront and said, the time is wrong, this is a youth with strong determination, a determination to matter to society. We will do it at a low tide before the sun comes up and at the turn of the tide, that will be in three days' time. The Oldman looked in my direction and just then the Arukarabo asked, but you are not his father? Yes, he is my boatman, the Oldman replied. Ok, but it has to be his will. Yes, the old man answered. Ok, but who pays the fees? The old man smiled and said, I will pay from our common purse. Ok, I will come next tomorrow and pass the night here and we will do it very early in the morning.

One afternoon we were all seated at the storm shelter then we saw three boats coming. When they were docked at our shores an old man shouted at the others to make use of the

backdoor, so they all fled through the backdoor. Only the Oldman and I were left at the storm shelter the Oldman approached them and was asked a few questions he went back into the building and brought out some documents after examining the documents they left but asked for the other members of the community. The Old man simply said they had gone fishing. After he had finished with them he came back to the shelter and sat with me. I asked him, what where those people here for, he dismissed this questions as them being mere tax collectors from the government. On another day a boat arrived again but this time the people sighted them even before they had the chance to get near the shore, so the people all disappeared into the mangrove again, only the Old man came out to answer them again and proceeded to show them the same papers again . On the third day when they came the people were actually out for fishing. Imopelebo had also gone out, even the Chinpelebo had also gone out, it was only me and the old man that were in the storm shelter. They asked the Oldman where all the people were, again the Oldman told them that everyone had gone to do their separate activities so the people that came this time knowing the Oldman was a pensioner they did not ask for the papers again. After they left, I asked the Oldman what is this thing about tax and why do they keep coming here for it. The Oldman explained it to me that tax is a payment that every adult makes to support government and I asked him about this tax that is it everyone that pays and the old man said yes that there are various type of taxes; that companies pay tax and other organization pay tax. The Oldman also added that it was only churches that do not pay tax but they are required to pay something for the land they are on . He said when I

grow up I will also need to pay tax that it is a statutory responsibility but that is the more reason why you do not belong here, I will tell you to go back and read your books and get a good Job in the government or in oil companies. The tax will be deducted from source and all this embarrassment will not be there but; son when you grow up you will take up leadership position, when you take leadership positions you must not forget. The Oldman then proceeded to tell me the responsibilities a good leader must carry out;

## 14

### **The Lessons**

In my pocket were two pages, one hand written and the other, old scrap papers, the Oldman had promised to always remember me in his prayers and advised that I should avoid some people as soon as I discover them, these he described as dream killers and included; Gossips, Jealous haters, Time wasters, Ungrateful people, Money grabbers, Over sensitive people, Excuse Makers, and Miss-educated people. Stay away from them.

Then and even now, the Oldman comes to me as a very interesting story teller, especially his stories on leadership, featuring General George Washington of the United States and, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses of Bible fame, whom he also describes as the greatest managers of men and community leadership. He also tells stories of David, Solomon, Josiah and Timothy, of these he describes as youngsters with energy, daring tendency and hearts filled with visions of the future.

On the subject of why I should be a teacher, the Old man further explained, describing the “Teacher” as a person of high morale standing and integrity, very skillful and great personality, who may also possess a number of other wonderful qualities; like a sense of humor, flexibility, kindness, leadership, people management, a calm demeanor, experienced in almost everything, with ability to multitask; these are some qualities the best teachers universally possess. The Oldman’s list of instructions included among others thirteen important life lessons any one should learn before the age of 30 years to ensure and have great years for the rest of life. He also said the trio of persistence,



perseverance and negotiation are essential character attributes anyone must learn, learn them, he emphasized. While persistence and perseverance are related, persistence tends to focus on overcoming specific obstacles, whereas perseverance is more about maintaining effort over a longer period. Negotiation, on the other hand, is a specific skill that can be used in various contexts, including business, personal relationships, and conflict resolution. Other related words of encourage includes;

### **1. Make friends with positive people alone.**

In your 20s, one of the most exciting things you do is hanging around peers and associating with others. If you don't do this right, you can associate with people who will destroy you. People we spend the most time with, add up to who we become. If you want to fly high, you need to join the eagles not chickens. There are people who are less accomplished in their personal and professional life, and there are people who are more accomplished than us. If you spend time with those who are behind you, your average will go down, and with it, your success. But if you spend time with people who are more accomplished than you, no matter how challenging life might be, you will become more successful. Be conscious of the people you spend time with because your association determines your acceleration.

### **2. You need access to library and books**

To be successful in life, you have to know hundreds of things most people don't know and the best place to get such knowledge is inside books. I know most young people hate reading but you must be different. You must be different

because you are what you read. If your body is a reflection of what you eat, then your mind is a reflection of what you read and study. Fill your body with good stuff, - not the uncontrolled pleasures and partying. Reading has several benefits like boosting your imagination, improving your communication skills, keeping your brain sharp and it will also help you learn about new things and become a more knowledgeable person. Knowledge is power or so they say.

### **3. Bad Habit will not help**

As youths and teenagers, and especially at your 20s, you are under a great temptation to try things. You may want to try smoking, drinking, sex and partying but that is like setting yourself up for a poor future. Whether it is a poor sleep cycle that you have acquired over the years or it is any excesses; smoking tendency, lying and petty stealing, you need to get rid of bad habits now or they will destroy you in the nearest future.

### **4. Learn to get organized**

Mess is always something we all need to deal with. It can be mess at work or at home. Most often than not this mess starts with small things cluttered all over until you get to a point where the mess becomes unorganized chaos and become too hard for you to handle. While some people take this to a completely different level and get obsessed about it, you should be reminded and consciously free yourself from any mess, physical, social or psychological mess that you may find yourself.

**5. Don't take anything for granted, Life can change in an instant.**

We often do not appreciate what we have until it is gone, that includes our health, our family, opportunities and friends, our jobs, and our money. When you are young, it seems that your parents will always be there, but they won't be there forever. You think you have plenty of time to get back in touch with your old friends or spend time with new ones, but you don't. You have the money to spend, or you think you will have it next month, but you might not. Nothing in your life is guaranteed to be there tomorrow, including those you love, opportunity you have and the help you are getting. This is a hard life lesson to learn, but it may be the most important of all: So, try and appreciate what you have, while you still have it and use it wisely so that your 30s, 40s and beyond will be free from regrets and blaming others.

**6. Make a plan and budget**

It may be difficult for you to understand now but many adults are in debt and are poor. One of the reasons for this is because they spend their money to acquire frivolities and liabilities. The first thing that you must learn to control as adult is your finances. It probably won't be fun, but you need to learn how to budget in your 20s. Budgeting doesn't have to be complex or difficult. You can make it extremely simple by making a simple list of what you need, when you will need it and control how you spend money.

**7. Form Saving & Investment Habit**

The average fisherman does not have savings and that is why we are poor. The fisher folks are poor not because they don't

have income but because they don't have savings habit. And so it is with the workers, more than 95% of the working people in the world will go broke the next month, if they lose their jobs today because they have no investment. I think your life should be different. Now that you are still a teenager and going into your 20s, try and form the habit of saving and learn about various investment portfolios.

### **8. Give up your need to be liked**

Think of yourself as someone different, a unique niche. There will be a lot of people who like that niche, and there will be individuals who will not. It's that simple. Do not follow all fashion trend to be liked. If you do, you are destroying your self-esteem. You are a man, outgrow the temptation of joining gangs, do not join gang or trending groups, the latest everything, just to be liked and respected by everyone. Easy come easy goes and all that glitters is not gold. Advise and warn yourself.

When you become an adult, you must know what you want for your life and go for it - You cannot please everyone.

Your siblings, friends or even parents may not like this but it doesn't matter. Most adults live their lives trying to please everyone and that's why they fail in life. The one secret to failure is trying to please everyone – You don't need everyone to agree with you or even like you.

It is human nature to want to belong, to be liked, respected and valued, but not at the expense of your integrity and happiness. Other people cannot give you the validation you seek. That has to come from your inside. As of first step, you must know what you want out of life and be willing to go for

it, even if some of your friends and siblings don't like your decisions.

### **9. Ask questions; there is no shame in not knowing**

No one has it all figured out. Nobody has all the answers. There's no shame in saying "I don't know." Pretending to be perfect does not make you perfect. So stop pretending as if you know it all or you have it all. It just makes you neurotic to keep up the pretense of manufactured perfection. Ask questions, even stupid ones. You may look stupid for some minutes but you will increase your knowledge and become a better adult.

### **10. Determine to Solve a Problem in Society**

You don't have to become the next Sampson Igobo Adoki, or John George, you can be anything, just nurture your imagination. There are hundreds of problems in the society around us that need to be addressed, but people usually choose to stay away from getting involved in anything that needs a bit of hard work. Find out that thing which bothers you the most – people are hungry, the rising pollution or the need for education, problems of illiteracy, child labor and animal welfare. You should make the world a better place and you can only do that by solving a problem. You can do it, if you believe you can.

### **11. Do not rush into things**

Often when we are young, just beginning our adult journey we feel as though we have to do everything at once. We need to decide everything, plan out our lives, experience everything, get to the top, find true love, figure out our life's

purpose, and do it all at the same time. No, slow down, don't rush into things and do not let anybody rush you, be observant and discerning, you should be serious and focused, you do not have to get everything figured out at the same time.

## **12. Life is not always fair**

Life's journey is filled with ups and downs, and it is essential to expect setbacks, mistakes, and emotional challenges along the way. To navigate these challenges, surround yourself with positive influences and avoid negative people who bring you down. Stay focused on your vision, and do not let obstacles deter you from achieving your goals. Continuously seek new opportunities and challenges, and don't rest on past successes. Let go of past experiences and focus on the present and future. When faced with challenges, confront them head-on, knowing that they will help you grow stronger and more resilient. By embracing life's challenges, you will rise above them and achieve greater heights. Successful people are not intimidated by challenges; instead, they welcome them as opportunities for growth and success.

Step out of your comfort zone to experience growth and new opportunities. It is essential to periodically assess and shed old habits that hold you back or add no value to your life, even if it may be challenging. Letting go of burdensome habits can be liberating and pave the way for personal growth and development.

## 15

### **Define Your Virtues**

Our character is reflected in our behaviors, which are often shaped by our underlying beliefs and values. By defining and embracing virtues, we clarify our values and solidify our beliefs about what is important to us. Living authentically and being true to oneself can be a challenging but ultimately liberating experience. When we shed the masks that hide our flaws and vulnerabilities, we create a ripple effect that inspires others to do the same. By defining our virtues, we create a guiding framework for our actions, helping us navigate life's challenges and make decisions that align with our values.

Embracing virtues such as honesty, kindness, and responsibility can serve as a foundation for living a virtuous life. These positive character traits and moral qualities guide our behavior and decision-making, shaping our interactions with others and our place in the world. By incorporating virtues into our daily lives, we can cultivate a strong sense of character and integrity, leading to a more authentic and fulfilling existence. By living in accordance with our values and virtues, we can build trust, respect, and strong relationships with others, and make a positive impact in the world. There are many different virtues that are valued across cultures and societies embodied in integrity, which Integrity refers to the quality of being honest, trustworthy, and having strong moral principles. It involves:

Consistency: Acting in accordance with your values and principles, even when faced with challenges or temptations.

Honesty: Being truthful and transparent in your words and actions.

Trustworthiness: Being reliable and dependable, and maintaining confidentiality when necessary.

Accountability: Taking responsibility for your actions and decisions.

Ethics: Adhering to a code of conduct or moral standards that guide your behavior.

Integrity is essential in personal and professional relationships, as it builds trust, credibility, and respect. When individuals or organizations demonstrate integrity, they are more likely to earn the trust and loyalty of others.

Examples of integrity includes:

Admitting mistakes and taking responsibility for them,

Being transparent in decision-making processes,

Keeping promises and commitments,

Acting with fairness and impartiality,

Standing up for what is right, even if it's difficult or unpopular,

Integrity matters is everything, it all matters:

Builds trust and credibility,

Fosters strong relationships and reputation,

Encourages accountability and responsibility,

Supports ethical decision-making,

Promotes a positive and respectful culture,

In summary, integrity is about doing the right thing, even when no one is watching, and being true to your values and principles.

Developing virtues requires practice, self-reflection, and a commitment to living a virtuous life. Here are some recommendations for developing virtues:



- Identify your values: Reflect on your values and identify the virtues that are most important to you.
- Practice virtues: Make a conscious effort to practice virtues in your daily life, such as honesty, kindness, and respect.
- Seek feedback: Seek feedback from others on your character and behavior, and be open to constructive criticism.
- Reflect on your actions: Regularly reflect on your actions and decisions, and consider how they align with your values and virtues.

Living a virtuous life requires a commitment to ongoing growth and development. Here are some recommendations:

- Set goals: Set goals for yourself that align with your values and virtues.
- Surround yourself with positive influences: Surround yourself with people who support and encourage you to live a virtuous life.
- Practice mindfulness: Practice mindfulness and self-reflection to stay focused on your values and virtues.
- Seek role models: Seek out role models who embody the virtues you aspire to, and learn from their examples.

Virtues are essential for living a good life, building strong relationships, and contributing to society. By understanding and developing virtues, individuals can cultivate a strong sense of character and make informed decisions that align with their values. By living a virtuous life, individuals can build trust, respect, and strong relationships with others, and make a positive impact in the world. By prioritizing virtues and making a commitment to living a virtuous life,

individuals can achieve personal growth, fulfillment, and a sense of purpose.

## 16

### **Reflections**

The realization of one's dreams is a momentous occasion that brings immense joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment. It's the culmination of hard work, determination, and perseverance. When dreams come true, it's a testament to an individual's unwavering commitment to their goals and aspirations. In this article, we'll explore the significance of achieving one's dreams and the key insights that contribute to success.

Achieving one's dreams is a complex process that involves several key factors. By understanding these factors, individuals can better navigate their own journey and increase their chances of success. Some of the most important insights include:

**Hard work and determination:** Achieving one's dreams often requires a tremendous amount of hard work and determination. It is essential to be willing to put in the time and effort required to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

**Resilience and adaptability:** Pursuing one's dreams can be fraught with challenges and setbacks. Developing resilience and adaptability can help individuals overcome these obstacles and stay focused on their goals.

**Positive mindset:** Maintaining a positive attitude and believing in oneself is crucial for achieving success. A positive mindset can help individuals stay motivated, overcome self-doubt, and push through challenges.

**Supportive environment:** Surrounding oneself with supportive people who encourage and believe in one's dreams can make a significant difference. A supportive

environment can provide valuable guidance, encouragement, and motivation. By incorporating these insights into their daily lives, individuals can increase their chances of achieving their dreams. It is essential to stay focused, motivated, and committed to one's goals, even in the face of challenges and setbacks.

“Dreams Come True” is more than just a phrase of life, it is a reality for many individuals who have worked tirelessly to achieve their goals. Here are some inspiring examples around the world:

Oprah Winfrey, according to available literature was born in poverty, Oprah faced numerous challenges, including abuse and teenage pregnancy. However, she persevered and went on to become a media mogul and philanthropist, building a billion-dollar empire. Her journey showcases the power of determination and hard work in overcoming adversity

J. K Rowling is a renowned author who faced rejection and poverty before achieving success with the Harry Potter series. Her books have sold over 500 million copies worldwide, and the franchise has grossed billions of dollars. Rowling's story highlights the importance of resilience and passion in pursuing one's dreams.

Michael Jordan's Basketball Career started while he was in his high school varsity team, Jordan's dedication and perseverance led him to become one of the greatest basketball players of all time, winning six NBA championships. His story demonstrates the value of hard work and ambition in overcoming obstacles.

Walt Disney's Creative Empire success story is a testament to the power of imagination and perseverance. He built a media empire, creating beloved characters like Mickey Mouse, and his legacy continues to inspire artists and entrepreneurs worldwide.

Sudha Murthy's Engineering Dreams came true, despite societal obstacles, Sudha Murthy pursued her dream of becoming an engineer and eventually became one of the first women to be hired by Tata Engineering. Her story showcases the importance of fighting for one's dreams and pushing boundaries.

Ritesh Agarwal's Entrepreneurial Journey started at a young age, he went on to become the world's youngest self-made billionaire, building OYO into a global hospitality brand. His success demonstrates the potential for innovation and entrepreneurship to turn dreams into reality. OYO stands for "On Your Own," reflecting the brand's vision of offering independent and affordable stay options for travelers worldwide. Founded in 2013, OYO has revolutionized the hospitality industry by providing standardized, quality accommodations at affordable prices. The name signifies the company's emphasis on letting guests plan and organize their stays while maintaining high comfort and service standards.

## 17

### **The Essence of Life**

Life is a precious gift, full of moments that shape us, mold us, and define us. It is a journey of discovery, of growth, and of transformation. At the heart of this journey are our dreams, aspirations, and passions, which give us direction, purpose, and meaning. Our dreams are the spark that ignites the flame of passion and purpose in our lives, driving us to pursue our goals and aspirations with energy and enthusiasm.

Dreams have the power to transform our lives in profound ways. They give us the courage to take risks, to push beyond our limits, and to strive for excellence. Dreams inspire us to be creative, to innovate, and to make a positive impact on the world around us. When we pursue our dreams, we tap into a deep well of motivation and enthusiasm, driving us to overcome obstacles and challenges. Dreams also give us a sense of purpose and direction, helping us to focus our efforts and energies on what truly matters.

Dreams have several key features that make them a powerful force in our lives. These include:

1. **Passion:** Dreams are often driven by passion, which is a key motivator that helps us to pursue our goals with energy and enthusiasm.
2. **Purpose:** Dreams give us a sense of purpose, helping us to focus our efforts and energies on what truly matters.
3. **Direction:** Dreams provide direction, guiding us towards our goals and aspirations.

4. Inspiration: Dreams can inspire creativity, innovation, and progress, pushing us to think outside the box and explore new possibilities.
5. Motivation: Dreams can motivate us to take action, driving us to work towards achieving our goals.
6. Resilience: Dreams can help us to develop resilience, enabling us to bounce back from setbacks and challenges.
7. Focus: Dreams can help us to stay focused, giving us a clear sense of direction and purpose.
8. Creativity: Dreams can inspire creativity, pushing us to think outside the box and explore new possibilities.
9. Innovation: Dreams can drive innovation, helping us to find new solutions to old problems.
10. Personal growth: Dreams can help us to grow and develop as individuals, building our confidence, skills, and character.

The implications of dreams are far-reaching and profound. When we pursue our dreams, we can experience a range of benefits, including:

- Personal growth: Pursuing our dreams can help us to grow and develop as individuals, building our confidence, skills, and character.
- Fulfillment: Achieving our dreams can bring a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, helping us to feel that our efforts have been worthwhile.
- Inspiration: Our dreams can inspire others, motivating them to pursue their own goals and aspirations.

- Legacy: Our dreams can leave a lasting legacy, impacting future generations and shaping the world around us.
- Happiness: Pursuing our dreams can bring us happiness and joy, helping us to live a life that is truly fulfilling and meaningful.

While pursuing our dreams can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience, there are also potential challenges and obstacles that we may face. To mitigate these challenges, we can employ a range of strategies, including:

- Setting clear goals: Setting clear and achievable goals can help us to stay focused and motivated, even in the face of challenges and setbacks.
- Building a support network: Surrounding ourselves with supportive people can help us to stay motivated and inspired, even when the going gets tough.
- Embracing failure: Embracing failure as an opportunity for growth and learning can help us to stay positive and motivated, even in the face of setbacks.
- Staying flexible: Staying flexible and adaptable can help us to navigate unexpected challenges and opportunities, staying focused on our long-term goals.
- Practicing self-care: Taking care of our physical, emotional, and mental well-being can help us to stay energized and motivated, even in the face of challenges and setbacks.



In conclusion, dreams are a powerful force in our lives, guiding us towards our goals and aspirations. They have the power to inspire creativity, innovation, and progress, pushing us to think outside the box and explore new possibilities. By pursuing our dreams, we can experience personal growth, fulfillment, and inspiration, leaving a lasting legacy that impacts future generations. While there may be challenges and obstacles along the way, employing mitigation strategies such as setting clear goals, building a support network, embracing failure, staying flexible, and practicing self-care can help us to stay focused and motivated. Ultimately, our dreams never die; they remain a guiding force in our lives, shaping our journey and influencing our experiences.

As we reflect on our cherished memories and life's journey, we can see how our dreams and aspirations have shaped us into the people we are today. Our dreams have given us direction, purpose, and meaning, helping us to navigate the complexities of life. Even as we grow and evolve, our dreams remain a constant source of inspiration, motivating us to strive for excellence and push beyond our limits.

In the end, it's not just about achieving our dreams, but about the journey itself – the struggles, the triumphs, and the lessons learned along the way. Our dreams are a reminder that life is full of possibilities and opportunities, and that with hard work, determination, and passion, we can achieve greatness.

So, let us hold onto our dreams, nurture them, and pursue them with all our hearts. Let us never give up on our aspirations, no matter how impossible they may seem.

For it is in pursuing our dreams that we truly come alive, and discover the depths of our potential.

In the words of Robert Browning, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp." May our dreams continue to inspire us, motivate us, and guide us towards a brighter future. May we never lose sight of what truly matters, and may our dreams remain a guiding force in our lives, shaping our journey and influencing our experiences.

Ultimately, dreams never die. They remain a part of us, a reminder of our potential, our passions, and our purpose. And as we continue on our life's journey, may our dreams remain a source of inspiration, motivation, and guidance, helping us to live a life that is truly fulfilling and meaningful.