

## **African Experience**

Although it was 31 years ago when my father, sister, and I traveled to Nigeria, I still have vivid memories of my time there.

The smell, the weather, the homes, the dirt roads, the cars, the public transportation, and the many market stands where fresh foods were sold. After arriving we stayed with a relative in Maiduguri and shortly after we stayed with an uncle in a ranch approximately a half mile from the main road.

If someone asked me what stood out to me the most in those moments, I'd have to say without a doubt the selfless hospitality, because they cared for us with the kind of love that is absent from the hearts of many today. What I've come to realize over these years is that it is in my family's tradition to love the way they do in Africa.

I remember one time we walked a short distance and waited on the corner for the public transportation vehicle, which seemed more like a van. It was one of those 100 degree days which was pretty normal. When it arrived we boarded it and found seating midway through. There was this guy on there who was traveling with some cargo and because it wasn't properly secured, it slid into my sister's leg. As it happened I giggled and was immediately chastised by my father with a slap to the head. " Hey, knock it off," he hollered at me in his heavy accent.

During the ride I stared out the window taking in the scenery of the many market stands that were alongside the street as flusters of people moved about. I watched as the many women walked nude with children tied to them and no one seemed amazed as much as me. What was wrong with them, or what was wrong with me? I guess it was because I was raised in an American culture that forced me to believe that showing skin was an indecent exposure, when in actuality it was an expression of freedom. Of course the answers to those questions are dependent upon where you stand when the consensus is taken.

I can't remember every detail about that day, but I know it was eventful as everyday spent there was. Another experience I had was gathering water from the well with a cousin which was located close to the house.

I'd never been to a well before, so I was amazed just peering into that 20-30 foot hole while my cousin lowered a tin bucket on a rope into it. This was something that he'd done many times before my arrival.

To many people it may appear to be nothing more than a collection of water from a well, but to my 7 year old mind it was breathtaking, especially knowing that we were around the same age. As I reflect on those moments I can't help from thinking about the occasions of drinkable water that was wasted while nations of people died on a quest to find it.