

OLORUN KU'SE

(The Unquantifiable life of the Asiwaju of Offa)



EMMANUEL OLATUNJI ADESOYE
ASIWAJU OF OFFA (OON, CON)

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THE
UNQUANTIFIABLE
LIFE OF THE
ASIWAJU OF OFFA

olamide longe

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By Olamide Longe

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FOREWORD

The request for me to write this foreword for the biography of my own predestined younger brother, who I am mourning, did not come to me as a surprise because I believe in predestination.

When the Late Chief Adesoye (OON, CON) and Asiwaju of Offa and I met in Kaduna in 1967 in the Civil Service of the Northern Nigeria Regional Government, he was a Quantity Surveyor in the Ministry of works and I was the Chief Medical officer (Preventive Services Division) in the Ministry of Health. Our predestined sibling relationship of elder brother-younger brother blossomed over the last half century until it had pleased the ALMIGHTY CREATOR to call him back home on 2nd December 2017.

Emmanuel Olatunji Adesoye was born in Lagos on the 25th

of April 1938. His father, Mr Abraham Adio Adesoye was Head Technician, Overhead Crane operation at the Nigerian Railway Workshop, Ebute Metta and his mother, Madam Maryam Adeoti Adesoye was a trader. Adesoye started his primary school education at in Bethel African Church Primary school, 13 Lagos Street, Ebute Metta. His education was however disrupted by the sudden death of his father from diabetes mellitus and his family had to return to Offa where he completed his primary school education. At Offa grammar school, Adesoye was a very popular footballer and was given the nickname “espee”, standing for “experience”. He was one of those lucky Class Five students permitted to sit for the final Senior Examination and they all did well.

From the examination results, he was selected for technical training by the Ministry of Works and since he was academically endowed, he ended his training as a Quantity Surveyor, the first indigene of Northern Region of Nigeria and the second in the whole federation to be professionally qualified.

In the UK, he finished his course in three years instead of five. He also got married to his heartthrob and they had the gift of their first born- a boy, named Oluwagbemiga. The three boarded M.V. Aureol on 14th February 1966 at Liverpool and arrived in Lagos fourteen days later. After visiting their family in Offa, they proceeded to Kaduna where Adesoye resumed work in the Ministry of Works, the period of his

scholarship being regarded as study leave without pay.

Due to the fact that Nigeria was involved in a Civil War between 1967 and mid-January 1971, the normal routine process in smooth running of government civil service was disrupted and emergency systems substituted. Deployment of staff to their different new states and the creation of ICSA (Interim Common Services Agency in Northern Nigeria) became a necessity. All these affected different senior civil servants differently. It was at this time that Adesoye decided to quit the civil service and be on his own- Adesoye and Partners was born amid various positive and negative supports of the proposal. However, to the Father's grace, the Quantity Surveyor's Consulting Firm was a huge success.

The country had just concluded a civil war, which required the replacement of infrastructures destroyed or damaged and needed attention. Government had just discovered oil and there were enough finances to cope with the needs of the newly created states. Adesoye and Partners later became a multi-disciplinary consultancy institution covering all the range of talents in Planning, Electrical, Mechanical Engineering and Quantity Surveying. Thus, it became involved in the construction of many of the important edifices in the Federation. The volume of demand became so heavy that he invited nine of his British Colleagues to come and join his consultancy Firm. Those who did received all the facilities in accommodation and other areas they missed

in their stead.

The biography deals fully with Adesoye holdings. Apart from being an industrialist and businessman, Adesoye performed most of his responsibilities to his fellow citizens and he did not spare any effort to put his hometown in a very important position in Kwara State. This was why I believe the Olofa-in-Council announced his chieftaincy title of Asiwaju of Offa on the day following the burial of the first Asiwaju, Hon. (Chief) Josiah Sunday Olawoyin.

I had paid due Tribute to my predestined younger brother in another publication in connection with the celebration of life of Chief Emmanuel Olatunji Adesoye, (CON, OON). THE Asiwaju of Offa. I recommend this biography to be read and owned by everyone, as its contents demonstrate how grace from ABOVE can transform poverty to wealth and how the rich should not neglect his responsibilities to fellow citizens.

Dr.(Chief) Jonathan Durojaiye Soley, O.O.N,

Bobagunwa of Offa

Baba Ijo Iyeru Okin African Church, Offa.

PREFACE

This work has been long in coming. It did not receive the blessing of Emmanuel Adesoye for a very long time. He always dismissed the idea, saying much of the information at his disposal should ordinarily be treated as classified and felt a moral duty to keep it as such. He had his hands in many pies and was very much in the mix with various circles of the elite, both in the public and private spheres of the country.

Towards the end of his life, however, he somewhat warmed up to the idea and early in February 2017, the exercise began in earnest. Unfortunately, the work was not concluded before the curtain call. Notwithstanding, most of the work is original and presented as he wanted it. This memoir, therefore, is essentially an autobiography and to a lesser degree a biography. His sudden bow forced a full stop to his narration

of his story. It is forgivable, therefore, to go to press with the little he was able to contribute to the work and to present it as part of the memorabilia during the celebration of his life and committal to Mother Earth. A fitting biography will be some work for the future, with considerable more time to do justice to the story of his life and achievements.

In the short period of his participation in this work, first-hand information about his childhood, education and family life was revealed. His vast business empire and other ventures are chronicled, with the notable ones examined in some detail. He also spoke of his service to his community. A chapter on the 'curtain call' is included, with an account of his last evening and a philosophical examination of his persona and achievements.

Chief Emmanuel Olatunji Adesoye came from very humble beginnings. At the peak of his entrepreneurial journey, however, he sat atop a vast empire of businesses with interests spanning a wide range of sectors of the economy and spread across various parts of the country, with outposts in the United Kingdom. He would often narrate the story of how he supplied exotic animals to set up a private zoo for an Arab sheik in the seventies. The animals were sourced from South Africa and air freighted, though one of the animals died and did not make it to its destination. Okin biscuits, perhaps the most widely known products of his companies, were sold all over Nigeria and many other West African

countries from Burkina Faso to Ivory Coast, Ghana and Togo. Adesoye College blazed the trail in private secondary school education thirty years ago and remains one of the well-established educational institutions in Nigeria.

He was Asiwaju Offa. As far back as 1977, the then Olofa of Offa, Oba Mustapha Olanipekun Ariwajoye II, created a chieftaincy title – Mayeloye of Offa – specifically to honour him in acknowledgement of his commanding contributions to the economy, growth and development of Offa. Adesoye literally launched Offa on to the economic, social and political maps of Kwara State and the country at large.

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Sincere gratitude goes to Asiwaju's children, Engineer Oluwagbemiga, Reverend Oluwasola, Dr. Folasade and Arch. Oluwakemi Adesoye and their spouses, for their trust and support and opening their world to me.

Many thanks also to all the respondents who took time off their busy schedules to reflect on their relationships with the late Chief E.O Adesoye, patiently answering questions and throwing new light, as much as they could, on the vast territory of his life and times. To mention just a few, among them are Chief Dr. Duro Soleyeye, Engineer Godwin Abayomi (GODAB), Dr. and Mrs Olafimihan and Dr. Ona Soleyeye.

My deepest appreciation also goes to the management

and staff of Olorunkuse House, Adesoye College, Offa and Supasteel Limited, for their unwavering assistance towards this project. Special thanks to Pastor Sylvanus Esenyi of the Lighthouse Church, Kaduna for being a great host and I am eternally grateful to Pastor Daniel Yohanna of Bethel Tabernacle, Ibadan.

To Mr. Ola Garuba for painstakingly reading over the drafts for an umpteenth number, for making vital suggestions, filling in the gaps and improving, over all, the language of this narrative, a special debt of gratitude is owed.

I will be forever grateful to Asiwaju Offa, Chief Adesoye, Ajani Ekun, for approving my appointment as his biographer and for the privilege to hear his story first-hand and make an attempt at telling it to the world in my own literary style. He departed with so much yet unsaid, but the much he did say should suffice.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGINS: THE MYTH OF OBA ALEBIOSU

Before proceeding with this narrative and to give a background of this colossal figure, perhaps it is most fitting to begin by delving into his origins and that of his beloved town Offa, albeit briefly. Legend has it that Offa was founded by a crown prince of Oyo and a direct descendant of King Oranmiyan of Ile-Ife named Olalomi Olofagangan, circa 1395¹. He was a hunter famous for his skills in archery. Offa literally means ‘a bow’ and He settled in different places, naming them all Offa. The one in Kwara State was the last stop in his sojourns and the most expansive and the most renowned of all the settlements he founded. The Olofa stool originated from him.

Offa was also the hometown of the legendary Moremi, a

¹ History of Offa, Oduna

queen believed to have helped in the defence of Ife and the eventual defeat of the frequent marauders who raided Ife. Ife is an ancient town and is believed to be the cradle of the Yoruba race. She was married to Oranmiyan and later Obalufon II.

The people of Offa speak the Ibolu dialect of the Yoruba language. This same dialect is spoken in other parts of Kwara as well as parts of Osun State. Offa is regarded as the traditional headquarters of the Ibolu speaking people. Each family in Offa belongs to an agbo-ile (compound/clan). These different compounds are grouped together under the administration of a ward, with one person appointed as the head of each ward and all the wards under the paramountcy of the Olofa of Offa. There are four wards in Offa namely Ojomu, Essa, Balogun and Shawo, which all pay obeisance to the Olofa. The Essa is next in ranking to the Olofa.

As with all ancient Yoruba towns, Offa has a praise name (oriki), hers is Ijakadi l'oro Offa, meaning 'Wrestling is our tradition'. Legend has it that two farmers went to their farms to harvest yams. On their way back, they stopped by the riverside to rest. While they were resting, the river surged and washed away a tuber. An argument ensued between the farmers, with each claiming ownership of the four tubers and rejecting the three. The war of words became a wrestling match,

neither one was willing to give in. The case was finally taken to the palace. After listening to their story, the Oba shared the remaining tubers between them equally, leaving one. He then summoned an Odofa, who, with a blindfold over his eyes sliced the remaining tuber into two equal vertical halves and gave one half each to the warring farmers. That put an end to the dispute. What stands out is the way each man refused to give up and this is used to illustrate the never give up spirit that is inherent in the average Offa indigene. The solution the Oba proffered illustrates justice and equity. The quarrel between the farmers is commemorated yearly through a re-enactment during the Moremi Festival held in the month of November.

The city's mascot is the peacock, which is one of the most prominent exotic avian species found in the region.

The key religions practised in Offa are Islam, Christianity and Traditional Religion. Both borrowed religions have a sprinkling of traditional beliefs. However, the predominant religion of the town is Islam. In spite of the different faiths practiced, the people co-exist peacefully, their core values and norms binding them together. The ability to do so should be credited to the concept of Omoluabi, which emphasises good character above all else. Also added to this were the values of hard work, self-reliance, honesty, integrity and social

responsibility. Then, there was respect for old age and loyalty to one's parents and local tradition. Omoluabi is committed to the good of all, irrespective of economic or social status. These ideals governed Yoruba interaction and socialisation. The Yoruba are generally regarded by their neighbours and acquaintances as experts in the art of diplomacy and decorum of behaviour and manners. Hardly would the Yoruba talk to you in a direct manner, hence their heavy use of proverbs and aphorism. Even in intra-communal and inter-communal politics, they are known for their political and social normalcy². The man Emmanuel Olatunji Adesoye was born into this kind of community. However, things are no longer as they used to be. Values are gradually being eroded and replaced by the concept of 'the expedient'; deterioration he found most disconcerting.

Each clan in Offa, much like the Olofa, has its origins myths and legends. Adesoye traced the origins of his clan, the Alebiosu clan of Offa, to a certain Oba Alebiosu. He (Alebiosu) was described as a descendant of the Alaafin of Oyo. He had set out from his original abode in Oyo, tarrying at many different places on his journey before finally settling at Offa Eso. The present-day homestead is located at Ile-ola isale in Offa. He had many wives, upward of twenty and about a hundred and twenty children. He also had such a lengthy oriki (praise

2 Omoluabi - Perspectives to Value and Character in Traditional Yoruba Societies

names) that it would require almost a whole day to recite. Abraham Adesoye, Emmanuel Adesoye's father, was his great grandson. This perhaps, might, explain the family's cognomen. In the Yoruba tradition, people with 'Ade' and 'Oye' in their family names usually are descended from royalty. Although there are those whose cognomen might reflect the benevolence of a king rather than royal lineage this is not the case with Adesoye, as oral evidence indicates royal ancestry³.

Early Life

Emmanuel Olatunji Adesoye was born on the 25th of April 1938. His arrival, it turned out, was overdue; not that he overstayed in his mother's womb, rather, his parents had welcomed two girls ahead of him. Thus, much supplication preceded his birth. It was a great cause for celebration when heaven finally heeded their call and he showed his face on that date. The heir had arrived! So contagious was his parents' joy that a Hausa neighbour promptly named the boy Tanko, one word that tells the story of his parents' wait. At the time of his birth, his parents, Abraham Adio Adesoye and Maryam Adeoti Adesoye, were living at 53 Patey Street, Ebute Metta in Lagos State. They were both Offa indigenes. His father was working for the Nigerian Railway Corporation. The Corporation employed him in Offa where he worked for some years and then transferred him to Lagos, where he

³ As narrated by Baba Alawe, Chief Alawe of Offa.

resumed in 1927.

Abraham Adesoye, though without any form of Western education, was employed as a crane technician. He soon became adept at manoeuvring the crane belonging to the Corporation and eventually became the head technician in the Department of Overhead Crane Operations at the locomotive workshop. He made use of the exposure his job allowed him to learn how to read and write and also taught himself the rudiments of engineering. He had a great interest in herbs, their various uses and efficacy. He was diabetic, therefore, one could hang his interest in herbs on the need to find a solution to this ailment, or it could have been his faith in the use of herbs to cure all inculcated in him from childhood, a common belief before the advent of Western medicine. In any case, he was said to have written two volumes on the use of native herbs for the treatment of all kinds of diseases.

He was an active member of the Offa Descendants Union (ODU) and also maintained a strong presence in his local church, the Iyeru Okin African Church, Offa. He married Mariam Adeoti in 1928 and took her with him to Lagos. She was a trader who also had a brief stint with the railway corporation as one of the labourers that carried the stones used in laying the tracks from Offa up to Mokwa in Niger State. She traded in textiles and commodities. Lore has it that she once travelled as far as

Badagry by foot to purchase wares for sale.

Chief Adesoye grew up in a household where everyone was summoned to morning prayers by a bell. With that ritual observed they would then depart to carry out their various tasks for the day. The same routine was repeated at night. They would gather for prayers, after which they would retire for the night. He was quite a troublesome child who fought over little things with other children in the neighbourhood. He began his formal education at Bethel African Church's primary school located at 13, Lagos Street, Ebute Metta.

Embedded in his head was a little boy's perception of school as long hours and a lengthy timetable. In those days, children learned by rote, repeating whatever the teacher said. By the end of school each day, he would be very tired. He recalled once asking the teacher for respite when the tiredness weighed on him to the point where he could no longer endure it. He sought permission to sleep, adding, "just a little," indicating just how little to the teacher with his thumb and index finger. As soon as consent was given him and a mat was brought in, all the other children followed suit. He imagined they must have been just as tired as he was, but he had been the only one bold enough to address the teacher.

After school, the children would go for after school

lessons, where they used a tray filled with sand to write the alphabet.

The tediousness that came with going to school did not prevent him from excelling in class. He observed that whenever he came first, he got bigger portions of the *guguru ati epa* (popcorn and ground nuts) that one Dr. Oyejola used to dole out to the children that passed by his Practice on their way to and from the school, which was on the same street with his Practice. He dished out these snacks to the children every Friday. Receiving the largest share of this bounty delighted him immensely. Soon, his father's friends also started to reward his efforts by giving him monetary gifts (one penny), also every Friday, which was the day the results were released. They would say, "*Omo Adesoye, you came first again*". His father was immensely proud of him. He never beat him and did not allow any other person to lay a hand on him. He indulged his son.

This tranquil existence was tragically disrupted when his father died at the age of fifty-three of complications from Diabetes Milletus. Chief Adesoye was about thirteen years old when this happened and it was a painful period for everyone. The death occurred in December when he was in the final term of primary four. As a result, he was unable to write the promotion to primary five exams, as he had to travel back to Offa with the rest of the family for

the funeral ceremonies, although his father had already been buried at the Atan Cemetery in Lagos. After the funeral ceremonies in Offa were over, he returned to Lagos to collect a transfer certificate to Offa, so he could continue his primary school education. When he got to the headmaster's office, the man out of sympathy for him gave him a pass, even though he had been unable to write the promotion exams. The headmaster said that Adesoye had, after all, consistently been the best student in his class throughout the period he was at the school.

The passing of Adesoye's father was an ending, not only in the sense of the finality of death, but also the end of a way of life, as he had known it. For without a doubt, it altered the course of his life and not his alone, it affected the entire family also. While the death of his father is described as an ending, it could also be pronounced as a beginning. The covering was gone and he and other members of his family had to make quick adjustments. They returned to their paternal homestead, Ile Ola Isale, in Offa.

The return was, without a doubt, a traumatic experience for all of them, but it was particularly so for Emmanuel's mother, bearing in mind that she was an *iyawo ile* (meaning, only a daughter-in-law) and not an *omo ile* (a daughter). If she received any sympathy from anyone at all, it was sparingly. Not only could she not mourn

her husband privately within the confines and comfort of her own space — she was given no time to recover — she was also subjected to a barrage of abuse from other women of the household whenever she fell short of what they considered was expected of an *iyawo*. They derived no small pleasure in mocking all her efforts at housekeeping. They turned the term *ara eko* (Lagosian) into a derogatory one, using it to deride her and whatever they believed she stood for. Conceivably, they envied her for having lived in a place they had only heard about. One can only speculate as to what their reasons really were. In those days, Lagos was viewed the way today young Nigerians view the United States and the United Kingdom. One can imagine Emmanuel and his siblings standing by helplessly, silently swallowing their outrage as these women poured invectives on their mother. Assuredly, such occurrences made his father's absence more poignant and it seemed their best moments were behind them. However, there was nothing else left to do but for everyone affected to make the most of the life fate had bequeathed them. Thus, life resumed a regular pace. He continued his primary school education at St. Mark's Anglican Elementary School in Offa, where, thanks to his former headmaster's benevolence, he was placed in primary five.

His favourite sport was football and he was very skilful at it. He loved football a great deal and once broke

an arm while playing. His mother would have given anything to make him stop, because of the various injuries he suffered. The day he broke his right arm he was meant to be at Sunday School. Instead, he had snuck off to play football. When he returned home, he told his mum a tall tale about how he had broken his arm. When she took him to the doctor, she had hoped that he would tell Emmanuel not to play football anymore; instead, he reassured the boy that he could go back to playing his beloved football once he had recovered. The doctor then rolled up his trouser leg to show Emmanuel an injury he had sustained while playing football in the UK. Emmanuel was so elated to hear that verdict that he forgot the pain of his broken arm. His mother was not pleased. She had felt that was her last chance to cure him of his obsession. On their way back home, she said the doctor only made that statement because he did not want to lose the money he would be paid for treating Adesoye.

At his new school in Offa, Emmanuel got the chance to display his skill one particular Friday, during a routine football practice. He played with such joy and abandon that the games master noticed his dexterity on the ball and quickly made him a member of the first eleven. The primary six pupils protested his inclusion, as only those in their class were considered eligible to be members of the school's first eleven. Not only was Emmanuel

not in primary six he was also a new boy, more or less an intruder. The Sports Master dismissed their protest, telling them that there was no helping it. “It is a matter of experience,” he had said and Adesoye’s display had shown that he had valuable experience. Football, being the main sporting and recreational activity in Offa, attracted all and sundry. Those who were unfamiliar with the English language had some difficulty pronouncing the word ‘experience’ the coach had used and substituted it with ‘*Eseepee*’, which became the name his schoolmates used for him.

His ability on the football field did not take away from his performance in class. He remained studious and continued to excel in his class work. As a result, he was among the nine children in primary five selected by the school’s headmaster to write the common entrance examination to the grammar school, against the practice of having them write it when they reached primary six. Adesoye was elated; however, there was a slight hiccup. The fee for the common entrance exam was five shillings and when he told his mother that he had been selected, she did not believe him. He was in primary five and as far as she knew, pupils did not write the common entrance until they got to primary six and not only that, he was also the youngest in his class. Today, he would have been considered quite old, but that was the era when many Nigerians were just waking up to Western

education and therefore, many started late. Besides, the practice was that you had to be able to touch your left ear with your right hand by reaching over your head, in order to be accepted to begin elementary school. His mum refused to give him the money, saying, “*O fe f’owo je epa ni*” (that he was only going to spend the money on groundnuts). It was not until he was sent out of the class for defaulting that she believed him and gave him the money. He wrote the exams, passed and was accepted into Offa Grammar School (OGS). That was no mean feat, as he had an older cousin in primary six who also took the exams, but unfortunately, did not pass.

Passing the exams turned out not to be enough, however; there was still another hurdle to scale. The fee for grammar school was £1.10, a substantial amount at that period and his mother balked when she heard this. She said that the five shillings for the common entrance she had been able to bear, but the £1 fee would be quite difficult. He got the money out of her in the end. There was also opposition from some members of his extended family against his going to the grammar school. Apparently, they were not happy about his successful leap and they sought to discourage his mother with insinuations. They implied that he would be expelled in the first year. They believed he would be unable to cope with the academic rigour of the grammar school due to his young age, and since he would then not have a school-leaving certificate,

what would become of him? The idea that he would be unable to cope was a strange point of reasoning from these people, seeing as he had just written an exam and passed it and in terrible circumstances too. In addition, it was unlikely that he would not have been given a certificate by the school, since the principal of the school had moved the motion. Nevertheless, their view saw to it that his mother refused him being a boarder at the school. He therefore ended up a day student of Offa Grammar School.

From the ashes of the rude awakening of life without his doting father, torn from his early nest with both his parents and siblings in the city to a somewhat makeshift and unwelcoming environment in the village, the making of an Adesoye began at Offa Grammar School. From OGS would emerge a young man of proven gift of superior intellect, skill and talent in sports, and endowed with native entrepreneurial spirit.

CHAPTER TWO

EDUCATION

OFFA GRAMMAR SCHOOL

It was with a feeling of great joy that Adesoye resumed at Offa Grammar School circa 1953. At last, he had become a student of a place he had admired and longed to go to since he had first set eyes on it after his return to Offa. A great accomplishment indeed for him. The school was a place of dreams. Adesoye had walked on the outside for so long, waiting, chafing for when he would have his day in a setting like this. Although, as one would imagine, if his father had not died the thought of attending Offa Grammar School would probably not have crossed his mind. He would have been dreaming about places like Kings College, Igbobi College and the other prestigious and reputable schools littered about Lagos. These schools certainly would not have been a stretch for a boy who was always coming top of his class. However, here he was with OGS as his only option.

He resumed at the school, went through the process of familiarising himself with the daily activities, the dos and don'ts and then when classes began, he discovered that the lessons were not difficult after all. He realised there was nothing he could not handle and settled in. It was not long before the sports master discovered his football ability and made him a member of the school's first team. As it happened when he had resumed in primary five at St Mark's and was made a member of the first eleven, there had never been a first year student admitted to the grammar school's first team. Again, just as it happened then, it was not a well-received decision, but it stood.

A non-demanding curriculum enabled him to indulge rather liberally in another hobby of his, table tennis. After school, instead of heading straight home, he would play table tennis until late in the afternoon and the boarders would wake from their siesta and find him still playing. The subjects offered in OGS in those days were Arts subjects such as History, Hygiene or Health Sciences, Geography, Arithmetic, Geometry and Algebra. Latin, also an Arts subject, was the one subject Adesoye disliked and he dropped it before long. He ran from it because he saw it as a dead language, that was what he told himself, but he actually dreaded it because he did not understand it and it confused him. He would however have to return to it much later.

In the meantime, he made a friend, a boy called Jide Falokun.

Together, after classes and office hours on school days, they would go to the Offa Railway Recreation Club to play table tennis and draughts with the principal of the college, Mr. J.A Osanyin. The principal was a man who showed a keen interest in all his students and kept up with their activities. He knew every one of them by their first names and got on fairly well with each one. The student population was not so large that any of the students got lost in the crowd. Mr. Osanyin was a dedicated educationist and an excellent mathematician. One day, for reasons best known to him – perhaps he felt the boys were beginning slack in their studies – he set up a maths test for them. It was a difficult one and no one in the class passed it. When the results came out, he said to Adesoye, “You couldn’t do my maths, but you had the time to compose a letter that compelled the D.O (District Officer) to visit Offa.” This was in reference to an incident that will come up as this story unfolds. Of the two friends (Jide and himself) Adesoye scored the higher mark, even though they both failed. Also, the principal seemed to have reserved his toughest criticism for the two of them. One might wonder why, but it seemed Adesoye and Jide held special interest for him. The only explanation for this is that Jide had a crush on his daughter back then and his desire was to marry her. Adesoye (his friends in OGS called him ‘Eseepee’) being a loyal friend supported him in his quest. They were quite audacious with this intention; that she was the principal’s daughter did not deter them in the least. They

would sometimes go to the principal's house and ask her to cook jollof rice for them and she usually obliged them. They could be in the dining room eating and the principal would walk in, he would see them but say nothing. The girl's name was Doyin. Nothing, however, came out of their puppy love; it was all very innocent.

As day students, Adesoye and Jide enjoyed more liberty than the boarders did, so their friends who were boarders would send them on errands to the town to get them an assortment of things. Palm wine, for instance, or they would send them to their female crushes. Among these friends was Dele Olashore, who would later become the founder of the well-known Olashore College in Osun State. He would send them specifically to get him palm wine.

Time fled by, it seemed and he found himself in form five, where, out of the blue, the principal decided that a select few of them in form five would not be spending six years in school, as was the custom. Instead, they were informed that they were going to take their O' level examination in the fifth form alongside those in the sixth; another instance of the good fortune he'd had in primary school. Not all the teachers were pleased with the principal's decision, however and one in particular, Mr Johnson, the Geography master, did not hide his displeasure. In view of this teacher's strong objection to the principal's decision, Adesoye concluded that he might not teach the students properly in an attempt

to prove that they were not ready. Thus, he decided to drop Geography. This led to a deficiency in the number of subjects he needed to meet the requirements for the exams. He had no other option but to take up Latin again.

He might have dismissed Latin as a dead language, but there was actually a less flippant reason for dropping it. He dreaded it, because he was always the first person the Latin teacher would call on to translate Latin texts to English. He would say, “Footballer, translate for us.” Adesoye would not be able to, because he was quite poor at it and the class would make fun of him. Adesoye believed the teacher was picking on him. He did not understand why the man continuously singled him out for ridicule. Consequently, rather than continue to suffer such humiliation he had exercised his right to drop the subject.

When he picked it up again and returned to the class after being forced to drop Geography, he believed the Latin teacher himself was shocked to see him back, although he never addressed it. Whatever the teacher’s feelings, Adesoye could not be bothered. He needed to devise a way to catch up with the class and pass Latin. It was a difficult time. Thus, during the long break, he along with two friends, Ajakaiye and Adefarasin Sumbo, decided to cram the entire Latin syllabus. It was during this exercise that he discovered a peculiar gift, that he had a photographic memory.

When school resumed, during the first Latin class, the teacher, continuing with his tradition that had been interrupted and perhaps to exact some kind of payment from Adesoye for dropping his subject and daring to return, called on him to do the translation. Of course, he had no idea that Adesoye had spent the holiday cramming the entire syllabus, so the teacher was not prepared for what he was about to witness. Adesoye stood up and asked the teacher what he wanted translated. They were studying *Virgil's the Aeneid*. The Latin master asked him to translate a passage from *The Aeneid Book 1*. Unruffled, Adesoye asked the teacher whether to keep the book open or closed. The teacher construed that as a stalling tactic and replied that it was Adesoye's decision. Adesoye decided to close it and read the *Book 1*, translating from Latin to English and English to Latin without looking at the book. The teacher was stunned, the class was impressed; they clapped and chanted his nickname, "Eseepee! Eseepee!" Adesoye was elated and basked in the moment, in his newfound fame.

The time spent at Offa Grammar School was not all intense class work, homework or just football; there were interesting episodes and surreal moments. Moments like during the first exams he would write in the school. If he was nervous, it dissipated the moment he saw the questions. However, a funny incident occurred. One of his mates, it turned out, had not studied. Instead, he had decided to use an Indian talisman he had ordered all the way from India, supposedly,

and he was told that all he had to do was to whisper the word “*papahurri*” and he would get the answers. So as they were writing the exam, suddenly, the class began to hear “*Papahurri.*” Quietly at first, then it began to reverberate through the classroom, “*Papahurri, papahurri!*” Apparently, after the student had whispered the word and nothing happened, he had decided to try shouting it. Unsurprisingly, he was nicknamed ‘*Papahurri*’ by the class. Even juniors called him Senior *Papahurri*.

Another memorable and funny episode occurred during a sports meet. One of the successful athletes in his class had been nicknamed ‘Terror’. He would bully his mates because of his remarkable feat on the tracks and his huge height. The rest of the class had been trying to come up with a way to tame him. An opportunity to do this presented itself during a sports competition by way of a new student. This student, of course, knew nothing about Terror, so he was unaware of their plans. There was a particular track event in which Terror had been dominating all other contestants. On this day, however, the new boy was leading Terror in the event and the class was happy to see this, as it was an opportunity to strip Terror of his bragging rights. Suddenly though, Terror began to gain ground on the new boy and everyone started shouting, “*Terror nbo, Terror nbo!*” (meaning, Terror is gaining on you) to warn the new student and encourage him to run faster. Rather, when he heard their shouts, he swerved off the field and ran away! The students later found

out that he thought they were shouting tiger *nbo* (a tiger is coming after you). One can only wonder at the stretch of his imagination, a tiger appearing out of nowhere? Naturally, he was nicknamed 'Terror *nbo*'.

Once, Adesoye wrote to the District Officer (D.O) in Ilorin, telling him that Offa needed a stadium. The man showed up at the school. Adesoye had written the letter making the request and promptly carried on with life, not exactly expecting much of a response. In those days, if the D.O showed up at your place, people would panic and cries of “*Eee ki l'oyinbo wa?*” (What does the white man want?) would reverberate throughout that area. This time, the *oyinbo* (white man) had come looking for a certain Adesoye. He was summoned to the Principal's office. The D.O asked if he had written the letter requesting for a stadium. When Adesoye answered in the affirmative, the D.O asked him to go with him and show him where he wanted the stadium located. Adesoye was shocked, but at the same time elated. He took the D.O to a place he had always envisioned a stadium should be and there the Offa stadium still stands today. He considered it a feat, as his request for the D.O to come was by itself quite importunate; talk less of asking him to build a stadium. His friends were envious. The Principal was referring to this audacious act when he scolded Adesoye for failing his maths test.

The school had a strong sports culture. There were many

sports activities and competitions providing the students various outlets for their excess energy. They had lawn tennis courts, an athletics track and football field at their disposal, to use whenever they were free. They used plywood to play tennis instead of racquets. They partook in many inter-school sports meets. During one of such meets, the football team travelled to Ibadan for a match. There, he and some of his friends had an experience they would never forget. It can only be described as biting off more than they could chew, in the literal sense. He had an elder relative, Y.F. Oyeyemi, who was studying at the University of Ibadan at that time and his girlfriend decided to treat them to lunch. The lunch was pounded yam and vegetable soup (Adesoye claimed not to have tasted any other like it after that meal) and they gladly indulged their palates. Time for the match came and they were ineffectual on the field; their saving grace was the rain that fell during play and led to the cancellation of the match. As a result of the cancellation, the match was declared a goalless draw, sparing him and the rest of the team an embarrassing defeat. Much later, whenever he would run into either of his friends who went with him to that lunch – Femi Adekanye and Aiyeleso – and he would refer to the pounded yam incident and its aftermath, they would beg him not to remind them.

Adesoye remembers a particular teammate who went with them to that competition. The fellow had never been in a taxicab before. Many of them had not, but they did not let

that show. Not this one though. He could not contain his awe and delight. Those days in Ibadan, the Morris Minor, a type of sedan, was used as taxis and a 'drop' (trip) cost three pence. When they returned to Offa, he narrated his experience to those who had not gone with them to Ibadan. When he got to the part about the taxis, he made a funny noise, "*Yiin, yiin*," to describe the sound the cabs made while in motion. He ended up with "Senior Yiin" as a nickname.

During school holidays, Adesoye divided his time between the town and the farm. He would spend half at one place and the second half at the other. While he enjoyed the idyllic rustic setting and the hunting and cooking involved, he hated going to the farm. Still, he would go to a family farm at Idi-Iya, where a captive sacred crocodile was kept in a circular holding. Farm work though, was in fact what he disliked. Most especially because of the nuisance of the so many flies that would start buzzing around a person's ears once there was a glimmer of sweat. He had a cousin, S.S Banwo, who loved farming a great deal. He was a very strong man and took to it easily. Adesoye was in awe of him.

Another family farm he would visit during the holiday was at a place called Igbo Idun. The Ramadan period was when he found going to the farm particularly enjoyable and this was because of the feasting involved. In the mornings, he and his cousins would eat with Muslims who were fasting. The meal usually consisted of pounded yam with bush

meat, after which they would set out for the farm. When they arrived at the farm, they would eat again. When it was time to break the fast in the evenings, they would again join their Muslim friends and dine with them. They would have prepared a variety of food; *ogi* (cornmeal pap), *moin moin*, *anama* (sweet potatoes), *amala* and there was usually lots of meat to go round. Because Adesoye and his kin were guests, they would serve them generous portions. Their hosts were usually unable to eat much. They ate fruits mostly, oranges, pawpaw and so on, when they were in season, because they needed fluids more than they needed solids. But, Adesoye would not hold back from eating the bounty placed before him. That period was always one long feast.

During one of his holidays at one of the farms, he had the scariest encounter he ever had in his youth. He was trying to prepare a stalk of guinea corn plant. He prepared to pull it down, unaware that a snake had latched onto it. The next minute, he saw a highly venomous snake precariously close to his hand. When he noticed, his reaction was swift. He dropped the snake and his cousin Banwo (the strong one) jumped to kill it. After he had, he began to pant and broke into a lament about the tragedy that could have happened: “How would I have explained to our people that I was unable to do anything to save Tunji’s life?” he wailed. It was then that it dawned on Adesoye what he had escaped and how close he had come to death. He found out that the Hausa referred to the snake as *gobe da nisa*, meaning tomorrow

would be too late.

As mentioned earlier, Adesoye divided his holiday period equally between the farm and the town. During one of the holidays spent at home, he befriended a certain neighbour of theirs (at Ile Anadawo) who did all sorts of odd jobs. For example, at the railway he did agency work, where he would collect money from those who boarded the train without a ticket or those whose luggage was not properly weighed in, while the 'big boys' would be in the canteen, having a good time. One day, this neighbour gave Adesoye a ride on the crossbar on his bicycle around the village, an experience he thoroughly enjoyed and remembered with fondness.

Another of Adesoye's cherished hobbies was photography. This pastime ended up generating some income for him while he was in grammar school; he made what was good money at that time. He was so adept at it that he became the unofficial photographer of the students, teachers and Nigerians living in Ghana who, when they wanted to return to Ghana and needed passport photos for certain documents, would go to him to have their photographs taken. His camera was a pinhole Kodak camera. His friend, Jide Falokun also had one. Jide's mother had bought one for him, so he made his mother buy him one too. He then proceeded to learn the difficult and critical details of film development. How to develop film negatives, how to use sodium phosphate and a chemical called a fixer. He learnt how to use the red paper,

the hurricane lamp and how to create the red light for the development of films. He was able to open the camera and cut the film inside. He learned all the tricks the profession required. He knew specifications and other characteristics of films. The grains of the film made the picture smooth when you enlarged the photograph. As such, grained films were very good for enlargement, the plain ones, not so good, he discovered. Whenever he was broke and could not buy film, which was three shillings, he would take a picture without exactly taking one and collect a shilling in three places. That is, from three people. When he had raised enough money to purchase a roll of film, which contained twelve exposures, he would go back to the people he had pretended to snap, especially those going to Ghana and tell them that the exposure was no good, he needed to retake the pictures. They would ask if they needed to pay again and he would tell them no. The idea worked wonders. He became quite famous as a result. The people would say, "He takes our photographs and if they turn out bad, he retakes them and does not charge us any additional fee." He remained a keen photographer even after leaving grammar school.

Kaduna

Adesoye, along with his classmates selected to sit for the common entrance in fifth form, made a promise to themselves that they would surpass their seniors in the sixth form in the exams. This was because the sixth formers, much like the

Geography teacher, had not been pleased with the news that their juniors were going to write the same exams as them. As they (the fifth formers) had pledged, in the first exams they wrote (the mock exams) they scored higher marks than their seniors did. All of them selected excelled, to the chagrin of those in the sixth form.

During the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) exams proper, Adesoye did well, but did not make Grade One. Notwithstanding, he excelled in Geometry, which was his favourite subject. As luck would have it, the Northern Region at that time needed people to train as technical officers, particularly for its Ministry of Works and based on his WAEC results, Adesoye was selected as an assistant technical officer-in-training. It might seem strange that Adesoye, a quintessential Yoruba man was classified as a northerner. With the way Nigeria was carved up then, his hometown, Offa, fell within the Northern Region. Therefore, even though he was Yoruba, for political purposes he was classified a northerner. This was good fortune for him, for after the O' level exams, once the results were out, his fate had more or less been in his hands. It was either he proceeded to further his education or found work to sustain himself. Hence, when the offer came, he welcomed it and gladly made his way to Kaduna, the seat of the Northern government. He travelled by train and the trip took less than a day. It was the first time he would leave his hometown.

On getting to Kaduna he stayed with an uncle of his, Mr. B.A Banwo and settled in. On his way to report for work/training the very first day, he met up with a neighbour, Benjamin Adekunle (later to be known as 'Black Scorpion' in the Nigerian army) and since they were headed in the same direction, because he was also resuming work that day, they set off together. There was a shortcut through St. Michael's Cathedral to where they were to report, so they took it. Unaware that they had strayed into a restricted area, they blissfully made their way. They came across a British commandant of the Nigeria Police Force who was on his morning inspection, who promptly arrested them. Perplexed, they explained, or rather tried to explain that they were on their way to report for duty and that they did not know that they were trespassing. He would not listen. He took them to the administrator and they ended up at the local government court on the same day. Thus, their first day of resumption at work began with a misadventure.

In court, they discovered that there were representatives available from each tribe for offenders. An agent of the court came to brief them and told them that they should not argue, but rather plead guilty, since they were only going to be fined. When they were called, however, Adesoye quickly interjected, "Guilty, but with reason." The rather languid judge, a *Magajin Gari*, roused with a start at that and mixing Hausa with English said, "*Mai ne ne* (What do you mean by) reason? You are guilty and you are saying with reason?"

Their court appointed agent quickly apologised on their behalf. At the end of it all, the court fined them 22 shillings, which Adekunle's sister paid. It was quick justice.

They went from the court straight to the ministry. Although they were late, as there had been no time fixed for the new entrants they were not queried. Adesoye was given an office immediately, his own desk and a drawing board. His days afterward consisted of being given a rough sketch and asked to improve on it. The atmosphere in the office was relaxed and pleasant. He discovered that there were many expatriates working with the ministry.

Living with his uncle was not the best of times; his uncle's wife was not the greatest host. However, he met her aggression with great reticence. He was able to bear the verbal onslaught by constantly telling himself it was only for a short while and before long, he got a place of his own. After some months on the job, the ministry sent him to Yaba Technical College, Lagos, to do a course for technical officers-in-training. He took to the place with joy. He had a beautiful experience there. The freedom and the comfort provided by the school made his stay pleasurable, in spite of the fact that he was not there for pleasure. The one year he spent there was one of intense study. He had little time to explore the town. There was a prize at the end of the course for the best performing student named the Costain Award. There was a caveat attached to it, however. To win it one

had to come first in every subject. Adesoye made this his goal and at the end of the course, he did come first in every subject and won the award.

There was one subject, however, that gave him a difficult time and that was the History of Architecture. This was primarily because of its immense volume. He studied the recommended textbook, which was written by Barrister Fletcher, a book that was also being used at the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria and realised that whereas the students at Zaria used this book throughout their five-year stay at the university, he and his colleagues at Yaba College were expected to finish it within a year. Adesoye, however, did not rely on that textbook, he relied on the notes the lecturer gave them. In retrospect, it was the best thing he could have done. In Mathematics, they did quadratic equations; he found that a bit curious, since they were not doing a course in Physical Sciences. He reasoned within himself that what was required was for them to know how many meters made an acre, because land was what they were dealing with. How many hectares, how many plots and so on. He based his study on that line of reasoning and much to his amazement and delight, these were exactly the type of questions that came out in the exams. Whereas his classmates had difficulty in converting the areas to acres and hectares, he had come up with a methodology that worked perfectly for him.

Done with the course, he returned to his job at the ministry with a new desire to study Medicine. He took this decision, because he felt medicine would be the launching pad that would propel him to the place he envisioned for himself in the future; it would help him achieve the goals that were percolating in his mind at that time. He had done Health Science in secondary school and it seemed that was sufficient to gain him admission for the course. He applied and received a scholarship to read Medicine and then proceeded to the Assistant Medical School in Kano for the entrance exam. However, on getting wind of his decision, his boss, a British architect named W. Gulwell, called him and asked him why he wanted to study Medicine. After Adesoye gave his reasons, Gulwell told him he would have sleepless nights once he qualified. He told him that the medical profession would afford him little time for himself, as he would constantly be placed on call and would barely have time for other things. He followed up this bit of counsel with the suggestion of what he felt was a suitable alternative, Quantity Surveying. According to Mr. Gulwell, no Nigerian at that time was enrolled for the course, thus the field was fallow, unexplored territory, full of potential. He succeeded in convincing Adesoye to jettison Medicine. But, what about his dreams, his goals, that place he had envisioned a career in Medicine would lead him to?

It has been said countless times that ignorance is bliss. Adesoye's decision to drop Medicine met with no resistance

or disappointment from his mother. However, he believed that if he'd had a parent who was not ignorant, she might have insisted that he studied Medicine and not Quantity Surveying. His mother did not know any better.

The path to Quantity Surveying was through an entrance examination at ABU, Zaria, for a place at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology. There were three of such in the country at that time, one in Ibadan, another in Zaria and the third in Enugu. Enugu was where he was headed. He found himself in a bit of a quandary on the day of the exam. While planning his trip, he had told himself the exam was at ten in the morning and decided he would leave for Zaria at nine. Much to his alarm, he later discovered the start time for the exams was nine and he had mixed up the timing. Thus, at the time he should have been in Zaria, he was still at the office in Kaduna. When he realised this he quickly rushed off to board a vehicle to Zaria, all the while wondering how he would explain his tardiness to the exam coordinator. He also worried over how many people may have turned out for the exams.

After much rumination, he decided on a reason he would give for arriving at the venue late. On reaching Zaria, he went in search of a Mr. Perry, who was to conduct the exams. He found Mr. Perry's wife. He told her that he had been in an accident. To make his story convincing, he had poured a malt drink on his trousers to look like dried blood. Mrs Perry

believed him and sympathised with him. She asked him if he had eaten and when he said he had not, directed him to go have lunch in the school's dining hall. After he had eaten, he went back to her and she asked him to return later to meet her husband. He found ways to occupy himself. Later, when Adesoye returned to the Perrys, he discovered that Mr. Perry was also working with the Ministry of Works in Kaduna. Mr. Perry told him to go catch some sleep and return the next day to take the exams. Adesoye spent the night in the students' hostel, grateful that he had not lost his chance.

The following day, he learned he was the only candidate for the exam. Mr. Perry left him alone in the room, after telling him to "take his time." As Adesoye was already working with the Ministry of Works, the questions were easy for him. He was asked to draw rather simple diagrams, to write a letter to prospective tenants and so on, including questions relevant to Quantity Surveying, all with which he was already familiar. With great certainty, he told some of his colleagues who had also travelled to Zaria to write the A' level qualification exams into Medicine, "*Mo ti pass!*" (I have passed) and returned to Kaduna to leave for Enugu.

As mentioned, he was no longer living with his uncle and now had his own bachelor pad. He was not living alone; his brother, Abimbola Adesoye was living with him. He had a peculiar trait that Adesoye found curious and considered an unusual gift; he could fall asleep with his eyes open. He

might be holding a book yet be fast asleep and one would have no clue, because his eyes would be open. And he could not be roused except one shouted his name. Anyway, for Abimbola, the best time of his life was when he lived with his big brother in Kaduna. He ate well, he would say. And when Adesoye left for Enugu, Abimbola stayed behind to make sure he finished the pot of soup he had prepared, before making his own departure from the flat.

A Year in Enugu

Adesoye resumed at the Nigeria College, Enugu and not long after was tagged 'Mayor' by his fellow students. This was because he had a bicycle, a Rudge model. It was a rare thing for a student to have a bicycle. They gave it a name; they called it 'Stagecoach' and having so named it, it stopped being Adesoye's alone but belonged to anyone who needed it. In any case, it was obvious they had only called him Mayor so they could have access to the bicycle. It was his first time in the Eastern Region, but he hardly felt out of place. It did not take him long to adjust.

A curious thing happened to him when it came to studying. He normally had no problem studying at night, but he found himself no longer able to after six in the evening. Every day, once he'd had his dinner it was straight off to sleep until the next day. Fortunately, it did not affect his performance in class, the one advantage being that he was always fresh and ready the next day and with his tenacious memory was able to

retain even more. Meanwhile, a course mate approached him one day, one Agbarangbo. He was impressed by Adesoye's brilliance in class, so he had gone to him inquiring, "Mayor, you don't sleep?" He asked this, because Adesoye was in the habit of sleeping with the lights on. And so whenever Agbarangbo got up to use the bathroom at night, he would notice the light still on in Adesoye's room and would conclude that he was still studying. Initially Adesoye did not debunk this notion, but when Agbarangbo began to wear himself out trying to keep up with him, Adesoye told him to make sure to look in whenever he walked by his room and see for himself what he was actually doing. Agbarangbo did so once or twice and found Adesoye deep in sleep and snoring to boot.

Adesoye took up table tennis again, hoping to shake off the lethargy that would overtake him soon after six in the evening. He had a partner, J.A Daramola, with whom he played. This did not help; he still could not stay awake beyond six p.m., whereas Daramola was able to study until about two a.m. Daramola would go on to be a renowned land surveyor. Table tennis did pay in a way, however. In fact, it became his best sport at Nigeria College and he played it competitively once or twice in the short time he spent there. Once, there came to town this very able Nigerian champion called Segun and his wife Mabel, a female champion in table tennis. Knowing how good he was and that it would not be easy to play against him, Adesoye conceived a way to beat

him by getting under his skin to unsettle his composure. He had noted, from his brief interaction with him, that Mr. Segun was somewhat egocentric. As the match proceeded, Adesoye began to showboat and the spectators, made up mostly of students from the school, began to hail him shouting, "Mayor, Mayor!" Mr. Segun got so upset that he totally 'lost his hand'. Adesoye became an instant celebrity after the match. He addressed a press conference and became a local champion. This Segun he had played against was the spouse of Mabel Segun, nee Aig-Imuokhuede, a famous Nigerian writer of children's literature, a poet and a table tennis champion.

He would end up spending only a year at the school. The management shut the school after students demonstrated against what they regarded as poor quality of feeding by management. The main cause of their displeasure was the size of the chicken portions. Each student was entitled to a quarter of a chicken every Saturday. Their complaint was that the quarter they were receiving had grown smaller. This was in an era when a student had an adequately furnished room all to himself, and they had cleaners to clean the rooms and change the bed sheets. It is quite ironic that many of them were from homes that could not afford anything near the quality of food or the kind of services they were receiving and which they began to demand as a right. One can only marvel at their sense of entitlement.

Adesoye did not spend the entire year holed up within the four walls of the campus. During his free time, he went on expeditions into the town. He noted some interesting things about the natives; that they carried their loads on their shoulders and nudity was prevalent among those that came from Milliken Hill¹. The students saw them whenever they came to the market. He also visited the Ogbunike Caves², which was an amazing experience for him. He learned that during the pre-colonial era, the warriors from that area used the caves as their hideout whenever war broke out between them and other settlements. It was a tricky place to navigate. To access it, one would have to crawl through a small opening and needed a guide familiar with the caves to lead the way. Inside, it looked like a small town. He believed one could live in those caves for years. What amazed him the most was the discovery that there were stalactites inside. He had not expected to see anything of the type.

There was a market called Ogbete Market that he would also visit. There, one could find whatever one needed. There was also a stadium, but it was a let-down for him. It was nothing to compare with the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan. He had expected something of that scale if not more impressive, as the regions used to compete with one another.

After the school was closed down, Adesoye returned to

¹ The Hill was named after the engineer who designed the road that cut through it.

² he Ogbunike Caves are in Ogbunike, Anambra State, Southeastern Nigeria and are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Kaduna and the Ministry of Works in Northern Nigeria. The Ministry, through the Northern Nigeria Government, then arranged for him to transfer his studies to the United Kingdom. They helped him to procure a passport, which was not an easy feat. Back then, to get a national passport was very difficult.

London

Adesoye arrived in the UK on October 1 1960, the day Nigeria celebrated her independence from Britain. He boarded a plane that had been specially set aside for students. They had a little drama on the way. The plane stalled over the Mediterranean Sea when one of the engines stopped working. He had a window seat so was able to notice that something strange was happening. He drew the attention of a flight attendant to it and she warned him not to let the others know, as they might panic. The plane was diverted to Barcelona Airport, Spain and it was after the plane had landed that the other passengers got wind of what had happened. They then started to shout that they no longer wanted to fly to London.

Adesoye remained calm. He reasoned that they were already just about two hours away from London and wondered if those clamouring to go back to Nigeria wanted to do so by road. He sent a postcard from the airport to inform his relatives about what had happened (he was certain it took weeks to reach home). Another plane was sent from London and they concluded the trip without further drama. When they

arrived at Heathrow, representatives of the British Council met the students and arranged transportation for them to their various destinations. Adesoye was one of the students taken to St. Pancras Station, where hotel accommodation had been arranged for them. He was paired with a certain Kolade who was there to study Dentistry, or something close to it. From there he headed to his final destination in Essex. The hotel he stayed in was one apparently favoured by sailors. The room was tiny and he felt the space was incomparable to what he'd had at Enugu. It was stifling. It had only one bed and a washbasin and to make things even gloomier, he had no roommate with whom to talk. He felt claustrophobic.

The following day, he reported at the college, the Southeast Essex College of Arts, Science and Technology. There, his supervisor arranged for him to stay with a Jewish family. It was from them he learned some Jewish customs. One that he found particularly appalling was that which involved doing nothing from Friday evening until Saturday evening, the Jewish Sabbath. Therefore, they ate salad on Saturdays, which is a holy day for Jews and they would not cook. He hated it. Moreover, within a few hours of his being with them, they had told him the life history of the previous student that had lived with them. He decided he would not discuss himself with them.

The man did his first shopping for him at Elford. They bought warm clothing and opened an account with a

bank. However, Adesoye was not happy living with them and he let the college know, so they arranged alternative accommodation for him. He moved in with Mr. and Mrs Tomlinson. Mr. Tomlinson was a bus conductor. His school was within walking distance from their house. They prepared breakfast, lunch on weekends and dinner on Sundays. His student allowance from the Northern Nigeria Government was £9:00 per month, out of which he saved more than half.

When he resumed at the college, he was to join part one to prepare for the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) exams, but there were no students in part one. Therefore, the head of department asked if he could cope in part two and he said yes. Since he had missed some classes and they could not repeat the lessons he had missed, Mr. Cox, the head of the Faculty of Building, asked him if he had any knowledge about construction. Adesoye told him that he did. Then, because of Adesoye's age, Mr. Cox decided to put him in the part two class and sternly warned him that no one failed a professional exam in his college. Adesoye was placed in the front seat and after every important statement, a lecturer would say, "You understand me, don't you?" He would oblige by only nodding his head. For Adesoye it was self-preservation not to say a word in reply. When they took their first internal exams and the results came out, the margin between him and the English fellow who came second was so wide that until he left the college no one ever asked him again if he understood what was being taught.

A certain lecturer, Mr. Overall, used to berate the English boys for allowing someone from 5,000 miles away to beat them in class. Adesoye suspected he was prejudiced, because when he showed him the drawings he had done in Nigeria (Enugu) for which he had scored 90%, Mr. Overall marked them and gave him 60%. Adesoye was very unhappy. His consolation was that the exams were external and professional, meaning that Mr. Overall would have no control over his exam results.

Adesoye was the only black man in his lily-white class and the students were not friendly people. They tried to belittle him and he often found himself having to respond to awkward and ridiculous questions from them. Questions like, “Do you have housing?” “How do you communicate?” Naturally, he replied to their inane questions with equally ridiculous answers. He was quite creative with his replies. He told them that people lived on trees and for communication they used drums. “Why are you eating the chicken bones, what do you feed your dogs?” To that, he replied, “Chocolate.” He had a friend, however, called Brian Newland, who would laugh at his replies and his colleagues’ silliness, as he had access to Adesoye’s newspaper from home called Citizen, published by the Northern Nigeria Government and sent to northern students studying abroad. The experience he had enabled him develop a thick skin, as he was able to cope beautifully with every attempt to undermine him. In any case, Adesoye did very little socialising, if he did any at all. He was fully focused on his purpose for being in that school. Even during

holidays he enrolled in other courses. He would attend normal classes in the daytime and in the evening, join the part-time students.

One incident stood out while he was preparing for his first professional exams and turned out to be rather instructive for him. It was on a Sunday and he was revising for the Land Surveying exam, which had been slated for the next day. In that particular subject you could gauge your performance while revising by marking yourself and allotting scores through a format they had been taught. Unfortunately, he was not making much headway with his revision. He could not arrive at the right answers. He was feeling saturated. He pondered on what to do, decided to relax and went to play football. While he was indulging in this distraction, his friend, B.B Eleshin, had gone to pay him a visit and wish him well in his exams. One can only imagine that he must have been very shocked to learn that Emmanuel was out playing football when there was an all-important exam the next day. Eleshin went to the field, found Emmanuel and scolded him for his actions. Emmanuel told Eleshin that he was no longer assimilating what he had been reading. All the same, he returned home, but did not go back to his books. He took a shower and waited for Monday. The incident was instructive, because he learned a valuable lesson about himself and was able to use it to aid his daughter who found herself in a similar situation many years later.

Monday arrived and he went to London for his exams. There were five questions. He did the first, scored himself and got 20 marks. He did the second, scored another 20. By the time he got to the last question, based on his calculation he had already scored 80 marks. The last question was to describe a theodolite. He thought to himself that no matter how poor his description he could not score anything less than 15. When he returned home, Eleshin asked him how the exam went and he responded offhandedly that it had gone well.

Eleshin was also studying Quantity Surveying at Southeast, but he was Adesoye's junior. They had been friends since their time at Offa Grammar School where Eleshin had been his senior. He had a very nervous disposition. He would perform well in class, but poorly during exams. He was such a bag of nerves. There was this day he was sharpening a pencil and he kept cutting his finger as he did. Adesoye advised him that he would have a nervous breakdown if he did not pull himself together. He confronted him with the fact that nobody would bear his responsibilities if he packed up, but rather his belongings would be sent home and everyone would be told that he, Eleshin, was a complete disappointment. Eleshin somewhat straightened himself out after that talk and amazingly appeared to have found a cure for his nervousness during exams.

The Return

After his studies at Southeast Essex, which he finished

ahead of schedule (he ought to have spent five years, but he finished in three), Adesoye worked briefly at three different consultancy firms in the UK and then took the decision to return to Nigeria. This was precipitated by an incident involving his landlord in London. He had married his long-time love after his studies and they had a son about a year after. Their landlord and his wife, who had no children of their own, could not bear the baby's crying at night and after a few days gave them notice to quit. This was during their tenancy in a property of a certain landlord named Rackman. He had become notorious for exploiting tenants and this had led the council to pass a resolution to protect tenants. The lawyer Adesoye's landlord had retained for himself encouraged Adesoye not to move out and advised him to reply his landlord and contest his decision to evict them. One can only speculate about the lawyer's reasons for such advice. Perhaps it was in the spirit of fairness. Whatever his reasons, Adesoye listened to the lawyer and counter-sued his landlord, alluding to a job that he had done for which the landlord had not paid him. Adesoye's initial intention had been to do the job *gratis*, but he decided to use it as a reason, just to gain time. By that time, the family had decided to return to Nigeria, although he did not inform anyone that he was leaving London. He took their luggage little by little to a company that handled such business and asked them to crate it in wooden boxes. The name of the company was something like Removal and Packaging Company. There

were nineteen boxes. He asked that they should be taken straight to Paddington Railway Station. There, Adesoye had the luggage weighed and asked for it to be sent ahead of him to the Liverpool port. When he got there, he received a great shock. One of the white porters approached him and said, "Let's strike a deal." He asked Adesoye to pay only half of the cost of the luggage and share the remaining half with him. Adesoye was amazed to find an Englishman in England requesting for a bribe, absolutely gobsmacked, as they say. He refused. Then one of the black men working at the station told him that if he did not pay, half of his luggage would not reach Lagos on time. Adesoye paid up.

The following day, February 14, Adesoye, his wife with their baby went by rail to Liverpool to board a ship to Nigeria. The *MV Aureol* set sail in the night of the same day. The next morning, February 15, they heard there had been a coup in Nigeria. They were already far out at sea, otherwise, they would have made a U-turn. Adesoye believed that if they had waited a day before they set sail he would not have returned to Nigeria. After all, he was quite comfortable in the UK and he had a good job. The situation in which they found themselves was frightening and worrying. Listening to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) only heightened their anxiety. A commentator said, "The Northern giants are marching towards the South." It sounded as if there would follow a Civil War. They were in the dark about the whole affair until they got to Sierra Leone. There, they got more

information from the West African Pilot newspaper, but it was highly censored. They spent a day in Sierra Leone, then sailed again and had another stop at Tema Harbour in Ghana. Adesoye had written a cousin of his who was living in Ghana to meet him at the harbour, but he never showed up. Since they were spending the night, they went to a hotel and he sent for his cousin. When he arrived, Adesoye understood why he had been reluctant to meet him at the harbour; he was in a terrible state. He learnt that he was in a bad situation financially. His shirt was worn and he had an unhealthy pallor. Adesoye did what he could to help him in that moment. They sailed again and arrived at the Apapa wharf in the morning.

They arrived in Lagos after fourteen days at sea, with intermittent stops at various ports. During that time, there was a table tennis match that Adesoye won, which had gained him some popularity. When they disembarked, Adesoye was surprised that among the throng at the wharf were journalists. How they had found out that there was a Quantity Surveyor among the passengers he did not know, but he was featured in the Lagos Weekend paper. They were surprised to meet Lagos calm after the furore over the coup. He saw a former classmate from Enugu who had joined the Nigerian Army. This man embraced him and Adesoye observed that other passengers were taken aback. With the coup still very fresh in everyone's mind, he wondered whether they were thinking he had somehow been part of the coup.

Adesoye and his wife spent the night with a certain Adebajo, a co-passenger they had met on the boat and with whom they had become close after spending fourteen days on the boat together. He had been a first class passenger, as Adesoye and his wife had also been. He founded the famous Stationery Stores Football Club, nicknamed Flamingo Babes. They stayed in one of his bungalows. It was not a wholesome experience for them, as they were battered by mosquitoes. Adesoye disliked mosquitoes; he had been without them for over three years. The bungalow had been empty for a long time, so that must have contributed to the high number of mosquitoes. Not even their baby was spared. The next day, they went to Iddo Railway Station and boarded a train to Offa. After a brief stop in Offa, they left for Kaduna.

Before leaving Lagos for Offa, he had met with Brigadier Alade Akinrinade, who had been a junior at Offa Grammar School. Alade Akinrinade had become a representative of the military government on the governing board of Lagos Estate Development Board. The board was searching for a qualified quantity surveyor. They had heard of Adesoye's return and before he knew what was happening, Akinrinade had him booked for an appointment with the board, which Adesoye turned down, as he had been made aware that there were murmurings among members against the idea of a Northerner, an "*araoke*", as they referred to him, becoming their boss. Thus, he returned to Kaduna, reported to his employer and got back his job. All those years he was in

London, he had been on study leave without pay, but he had received a monthly student allowance.

The Civil Servant

In Kaduna, he reported to Mr. G.K Alexander, his former boss and the principal surveyor in the Ministry of Works. When he informed him that he was done with his studies Mr. Alexander was surprised, as Adesoye was meant to have spent five and half years, but he was back in exactly three and a half years. Not convinced, he asked if Adesoye was on holiday to which he replied no and showed Mr. Alexander a copy of his professional qualification certificate. Mr. Alexander was speechless for about ten minutes.

Prior to meeting G.K Alexander, Adesoye had received an offer of appointment from the Federal Government. The Federal Government had been searching for a quantity surveyor and on learning that he was available, had approached him. They were going to pay more than the Regional Government, but Adesoye turned down the offer. He had gone to the ministry's permanent secretary, his overall boss and informed him about the Federal Government's offer. The man had replied that he was aware of the offer as the Federal Government had written to him asking him to release Adesoye, but he had refused. He then told Adesoye to go back to his office. He added Adesoye could, if need be, stay in his house. Adesoye reported to his office and went to present himself to G.K Alexander.

The same opportunity for growth was available, whether with the Federal or the Regional Government, as he had virtually no rival in the field. His main competitors were expatriates and the country, having gained independence, was looking for indigenes to replace the foreigners. He was the second Quantity Surveyor in the country, but the first Yoruba and Northerner to be one. The other Quantity Surveyor had left Nigeria for East Africa as a refugee after the coup of 1966, so there was no one to compete with him. The first task he was given to do on resuming work at the Ministry of Works was to compile a list of registered contractors. A rather rudimentary and mundane assignment to give a chartered Quantity Surveyor, but he did not protest. Then, he was asked to revise the specifications for building works in the Northern Region, to take account of local materials and the labour process in the construction industry in Nigeria. When he reviewed the existing documents, he discovered that there was nothing on brickwork. The section on brickwork/block work, both in the specification for building works and the draft bills of quantities used in the public sector, owes much of its origins and credit to Adesoye.

Naturally, as in all spheres of human endeavour, the Civil Service had its own share of political intrigues. There were certain allowances given out every month, depending on the classification of your vehicle. There were three classes – A, B and C. The highest was C followed by B, with A the lowest. Class C could receive up to £16 per month. B

received £13 and class A, the lowest, received about £9. A surveyor received a class B allowance. If you were a fully loaded surveyor with equipment, you fell under class C. A fully loaded surveyor had all the equipment needed for a survey attached to his vehicle and was usually out doing fieldwork. When out on the field, they could be gone for days.

Once, Adesoye applied for the class C touring allowance, which he had the right to claim, but interesting twists and turns ensued. His immediate supervisor, a senior Quantity Surveyor, accepted his request and recommended him. He showed Adesoye the paper of recommendation, but curiously went to their head, the chief architect and told him not to approve it. Having done this, the supervisor then returned to Adesoye and told him that the head had refused to grant his request. Adesoye immediately went to the office of the head and confronted him. His superiors were expatriates, but Adesoye was not in any way intimidated by them. He felt he ought to let the man know who really owned the country. In the middle of his tirade, the chief architect cut in and informed Adesoye that the same person who had recommended him had also advised the head not to approve the request. The harassed man, after stating his side, subsequently changed the 'not approved' status to 'approved'. Adesoye went back to the senior Quantity Surveyor, thanked him for his recommendation and told him approval had been given. The man could not hide the humiliation he felt.

Another example of the politics that went on in the Civil Service followed a tragic incident. They woke up one weekend to learn that one of the expatriate architects had committed suicide; he had been spurned by his expatriate girlfriend. However, in a classic demonstration of 'life goes on', the Monday after the news broke, one of the Nigerian architects under him wrote a letter immediately applying to take his job. Another one joined him. Thus, there were two vying for the post. One was by name Shehu. He was more popular with everybody and he eventually got the job.

Not long after the debacle that followed his request for a category C allowance, Adesoye was promoted to the position of Senior Quantity Surveyor, which made him responsible for all the quantity surveying service in the ministry from Maiduguri to Ilorin. It was quite a huge area to cover. He toured the length and breadth of the Northern Region. In all his travels, he found that Maiduguri was, in his estimation, the neatest town in Nigeria. Broad streets, mosquitoes wiped out, but it got unbearably hot in the afternoon, especially during the dry season.

Handling contracts was a tricky issue. Sometimes, the contractors would offer gifts to them. For instance, on one occasion there was a Tenders Board meeting and when they were about to start, Adesoye told the chairman that he had a small problem. When the man asked what it was, Adesoye told him he felt compromised, because he had received

two dozen eggs from one Alhaji Usman, a contractor. The chairman laughed. It turned out that the contractor had gone to the kitchen of every staff member with two dozen eggs. When they took their decision, the alhaji lost. He did not lose because of the two dozen eggs, but because someone who had no known capacity to manage a simple contract was bidding to purchase a plane for the Northern Region. Two dozen eggs became a longstanding joke among the officers.

During that period, once the Tenders Board approved a project, every valuation for payment was passed to the sub registry and letters were subsequently written to the contractors to go to the sub registry to collect their money, very unlike what obtains in the country today.

The Northern Nigeria Civil Service at that time had a high percentage of expatriates. Adesoye's department in the Ministry of Works was particularly dominated by expatriates. Adesoye was able to rise rapidly through the ranks because of his unique position not only as a native but as also a fully qualified Chartered Quantity Surveyor. The best had come rather quickly in his career in the Civil Service. The inevitable yearning for new challenges and new adventures soon set in. In 1965, Adesoye left the service to establish his consultancy practice, Adesoye and Partners. Hitting the ground at a run, about five years later he would preside over an empire of business ventures spanning a bewildering range of almost every field of human enterprise.

CHAPTER THREE

INDUSTRIAL ADVENTURE

In 1967, in the wake of the Civil War, General Yakubu Gowon created 12 states out of the four regions – the Northern, Eastern and Southern and the Mid-western. These states became operational in 1968. Adesoye was named acting Chief Architect for the Interim Common Services Agency (ICSA), an agency formed to stand in the gap and handle any shortfall that arose from the creation of states, especially when it came to acquiring skilled hands, as indigenes of the new states went back to their respective states. The Northern Region suffered a shortage of skilled hands, due largely to the small number of indigenes with technical education compared to other regions. At that time Southerners dominated the Northern Nigeria Civil Service. The ICSA also handled any work the Federal Government needed done in the North.

While some on the staff of the Ministry of Works redeployed to the newly created states, Adesoye remained in Kaduna. As a result, the demand on his time increased as the other states created out of the Northern Region also constantly sought his service. They sought his input to their budgeting for buildings; they needed him to review them to be sure they met the given requirements, a necessary step before they could proceed at that time. The work kept piling up and he began to see how more beneficial it would be for him if he launched out on his own and freed himself of unnecessary encumbrances, office bureaucracy and what have you. Technically, he had reached the pinnacle in the service of the government, as far as he was concerned. Consequently, he decided it was time for him to launch out and take charge of his own destiny, albeit on a limb, given that the Nigerian state was at war, with the attendant uncertainties. Prior to making his final decision, however, he had discussed his plans with his wife and she had given her unequivocal support.

Quite a number of people within his immediate family and social circle believed that he would pay dearly for his decision. This was hardly a surprising point of view on their part, considering the plum post he was leaving behind. As a Senior Civil Servant, the government provided everything in your house. You lived in the Government Quarters in the Government Reserved Area (G.R.A.) where even light bulbs were provided by the government. If the light bulbs burnt out, you went to the Public Works Department (PWD) workshop

for replacements. They supplied cookers, mosquito nets, beds and bedding, electric bulbs and so on. All he'd had to pay for were the gardener and the cook. That his decision would also have implications for his children as well, and not just he and his wife made the decision seem extreme. Moreover, in those days, young people dreamed of working in the Nigerian Civil Service. It was the culmination of the dreams of many and here he was only thirty and tossing it. Some of the people who considered his decision absurd were not exactly shy about expressing their opinions. Many pronounced to his hearing that he would suffer. Regardless, he did not allow their pronouncements to have an adverse effect on him. Without a doubt it must have cut to the quick to hear those he considered kindred making such unflattering remarks, but the die was cast. His mind was made up and they ceased to matter. Thus, he left the Civil Service and Adesoye and Partners was born.

Inevitably, a rough patch followed immediately after. He had to move out of his highbrow government quarters and turn in all other government property in his possession. He rented an apartment from the Northern Nigeria Development Commission (NNDC). The first night after his departure was quite a night. He and his family slept on a mattress placed on the bare floor. The next day, however, they went shopping for beds. Then came the grind – the search for commission and work. In the beginning, he got small jobs here and there, nothing significant, but they were building blocks

The year was 1968. The events of the preceding narrative were all building up to this moment. All that had gone on before were rungs on a ladder, little steps bringing things closer to the moment when Emmanuel Olatunji Adesoye came into his own. Losing his father and then becoming a boy-man who helped his mother look after his siblings while in grammar school, trading the comfort of the familiar for the unfamiliar, adapting himself to new surroundings and enduring for as long as possible whatever shade of abuse was thrown at him. Forced discipline, one might say, but they were all experiences that nurtured and shaped him and through it all, he was able to maintain singular focus on whatever he was doing at that moment.

As aforementioned, there were many naysayers. However, he also had folks who believed in his aspiration. Many people helped him along the way as he began his private practice. His brother-in-law, Dr Afolabi called him, brought out his passbook and gave it to him, showed him what he had saved up and said Adesoye could have the entire amount as a show of support for his enterprise. Adesoye did not accept it, but deeply appreciated the gesture. It served as salve on the sore that those who had pronounced that he would suffer had inflicted.

Enter Chief J.D Soley, a fellow Offa citizen, a renowned medical practitioner, a pioneer and his chief mentor.

Adesoye first met Dr. Soleye in Kaduna. Dr. Soleye was at that time the chief medical officer in the Preventive Services Division the Northern Nigeria Government. Adesoye was the head of the Quantity Surveying Department of the Ministry of Works. A strong bond developed between them, akin to a father/son or elder brother/younger brother relationship; a relationship that took on different shades per time, depending on the circumstance in which they found themselves. Thus, the good doctor was one of his ardent supporters. Whenever Adesoye went to Lagos in pursuit of work, Chief Soleye would open up his house to him. He had a double bed. Adesoye would lie in one corner while Chief Soleye would lie in another. At six in the morning, Chief Soleye would wake Adesoye up with a cup of tea. He would offer him his car to use for the day. Chief Soleye introduced him to some of his colleagues in the ministry: permanent secretaries, commissioners and such, opening the doors for Adesoye. These attempts on the doctor's part did not immediately result in any direct offers of work to Adesoye, but through Soleye, he met Dokun Adeyemi, who was an architect. Dokun introduced him to one Timothy Odolumeru, who was job hunting. Mr. Odolumeru was a budding quantity surveyor who had not professionally qualified. Nevertheless, Adesoye hired him. He had no inkling that his new employee was cousin to the director of the Federal Public Works Department. Through the director, his fledgling consultancy firm got a commission for a new Police College in Jos.

After that came the massive Federal Secretariat complex at Obalende, Lagos, which was a big one. The firm made quite a lot of money from those commissions and Adesoye and Partners was well on its way.

As demand for the firm's services grew, he opened offices in different locations. Adesoye remained in Kaduna, retaining it as his base while he put Odolumeru in charge of the Lagos office. With him there, they were able to secure an office at Denton Street, the former office and workshop of E.M Zappas. They rented the place and set it up tastefully. Then the firm got a job in Port Harcourt and Odolumeru was sent to Port Harcourt. An office was temporarily set up at the Hotel Presidential in the GRA. The demand of the job reached a level where he needed more hands and expertise than were available in the country, to the extent that he invited some of his classmates from his college in the UK to come and work for him. Those who agreed he provided housing for, with amenities similar to the ones they had to leave behind to sweeten the offer and make their stay pleasant. The firm employed about nine British quantity surveyors at that time. The firm continued to grow and commissions kept coming in. Eventually, they covered all the states of the federation. Before long, Adesoye had built a world-class quantity-surveying practice, a very successful one that was the toast of the Nigerian building sector.

It is necessary to explore Adesoye and Partners' spectacular

success, because from it sprung all of his other enterprises. To put it into context, the concept of preparation and opportunity would appear most fitting. The opportunity would be the fallow ground on to which he launched himself when he set out on his own on the one hand, and the massive infrastructural reconstruction programme following the Civil War and the oil boom that subsequently set in to propel government spending to fever heights in various sectors of the economy on the other.

With hindsight, one sees clearly that it was such an opportune time for anybody equipped with the requisite preparation to strike out. For chronological context of the opportunity, Nigeria had just fought a civil war ('66, '67), the war had just ended ('71, '72), then there was the oil boom of '73. Nigeria had become one huge construction site, due to the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure. Quantity surveying service during that period was totally dominated by foreign firms against the entry on to the scene of a local who was as qualified, skilled and as established as the expatriates. The preparation was all that had gone before – his joining the Northern Nigeria Civil Service as a technician-in-training after secondary school and attaining the ultimate qualification in quantity surveying, passing his exams long before the set time. He knew his trade. He had singular focus on his objective, ignoring unnecessary distractions and not allowing the most strident of the naysayers around to shake him.

Adesoye and Partners would later evolve into a multi-disciplinary consultancy practice, encompassing all the range of talents in the procurement process of the built environment; Planning, Architecture, Structural Engineering, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering and Quantity Surveying. A few of the landmark projects handled by Adesoye and Partners include the Federal Secretariat Complex, Lagos, the headquarters of the old Savannah Bank in Lagos, the National Mosque in Abuja, the Sheraton Hotel, Abuja, NICON Luxury Hotel, Abuja, The Radio House Abuja, Nigeria House in Washington, Jos and Zaria Teaching Hospitals. Indeed, Adesoye and Partners wrote the cost guide for a standard 500-bed teaching hospital in Nigeria in the seventies for the Federal Government. The master plan for the Federal University of Technology, Minna was drawn up by Adesoye and Partners, aside from having the brief for the executive design of many of the departments and communal facilities of the university. In the seventies and early eighties, Adesoye and Partners got briefs for over 60 projects annually, literally having a new commission every week and sometimes two or three in one week. It had offices in Kaduna, Jos, Lagos, Ilorin, Port Harcourt and Zaria, employing over a hundred people. In 1976, the company contemplated acquiring a Cessna private jet with a view to cope better with the demand to be at so many sites scattered all over the country at the same time. A generation of quantity surveyors, who have gone ahead to establish

flourishing private consultancy practices, cut their teeth at Adesoye and Partners. The Quantity Surveying Department of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the first university in Nigeria to offer degree courses in Quantity Surveying, owes its successful establishment and sustenance at its infancy to the staff of Adesoye and Partners, who were seconded by Adesoye to handle the professional subjects in its curriculum on weekends. As a mark of recognition, the course at ABU was promptly given full accreditation by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in the United Kingdom and the graduates from the department were offered full exemption from the first and second stages of the qualifying examination leading to the attainment of the full-chartered membership status of the institution.

Adesoye and Partners was also a pioneer in Project Management as a distinct professional service in the built environment in the early eighties in Nigeria. With the range of talents available in-house under its roof, Adesoye and Partners was a natural choice for the brief for the overall responsibility for the planning, design, procurement and commissioning of building projects from its numerous clients. At its peak, Adesoye and Partners paraded a dazzling array of wide ranging past projects for different clients, both public and private and acquired a front row seat among consultancy practices in the building industry in Nigeria.

Vulcan Gases

With his success in the consultancy business and the financial gain and stability that followed, Adesoye began to nurture the idea of expanding beyond quantity surveying. His first endeavour was a gas plant, which he named Vulcan Gases. The idea to start a gas plant was conceived while he was observing a company making oxygen. He realised that the raw material was from the air and was free. Acetylene is from calcium carbide, oxygen is free. The only thing to do is to compress the air and after a certain period, the oxygen is separated and with further compression, it becomes liquid ready for storage. One might speculate about his curiosity about the uses of oxygen and acetylene and his reasons for starting a gas plant. It was not very far-fetched, considering that he was working in construction. A lot of welding takes place on a construction site and the two gases were used in welding. Additionally, he must have also been thinking about how to expand his business within his native industry. He recognised the usefulness of industrial gases and was hopeful that the profits that would accrue from the venture would help keep Adesoye and Partners afloat during lean times in the industry. Vulcan Gases became his first industrial adventure and he situated the company in Kaduna. The name Vulcan explains immediately what the company was about, at least for those with some knowledge of

Roman mythology. Vulcan is the name of the Roman god of fire, metalwork and the forge. It is also a play on the word volcano.

As it appeared to have become inescapable whenever he was venturing into anything, Vulcan Gases experienced its own share of obstacles. The then British Nigeria Company, a dominant player in the industrial gas market at that time, felt threatened by the arrival of another player on the scene. When Vulcan Gases needed an engineer to run the factory, the British Nigeria Company asked one of their British staffers to apply and he was posted to destroy Vulcan Gases. First was the report from this engineer, after Adesoye had employed him, that the plant was decrepit and that the whole venture should be scrapped. Fortunately, before Adesoye could take any drastic measure, a sympathiser with links to the British company and some knowledge about what was happening behind the scene came forward and informed him that the engineer was also in the employ of the British Nigeria Company and warned Adesoye to be careful. The engineer was sacked and not long after was employed by a foreign company, seeming to confirm suspicions about his intentions. This was followed by a disagreement with the lender, Nigeria Acceptancy, a development bank that provided the loans for the venture. Vulcan Gases had borrowed money to import cylinders to bottle its products. One day, the

chairman of Nigeria Acceptancy and some executives of the bank came to the factory, accused them of diverting the resources of the company and threatened to shut the company down. Adesoye replied that they could perhaps accuse Vulcan Gases of defaulting on the repayment of the loan and indeed, they had missed three instalments. However, they were building other factories on the land, the certificate of occupancy for which they had given the bank for security, the implication being that their collateral was now more than five times its previous value. Adesoye insisted that there was no way they were going to foreclose and demanded to know how much his company owed. When the chairman of the bank gave him the figure, he said he was willing to pay back everything there and then. The chairman was taken by surprise. Apparently, he had not expected Adesoye to be in a position to call their bluff. When he noticed Adesoye's stance, the man changed his tone, became more malleable and tried to placate his displeased client. "No, No," he took on a conciliatory tone, but Adesoye told them that he wanted his document back within the next few days. The man said they were no longer foreclosing, but Adesoye's mind was made up. He liquidated his indebtedness and was given his certificate.

Okin Biscuits

Adesoye and partners won the brief for the quantity

surveying services for the new Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Zaria. A project that held potential as the largest commission yet earned. When the job was complete, Adesoye took his earnings amounting to about N 300, 000. 00 to Offa, to begin Okin Biscuits. He had considered the idea of opening an assembly plant for refrigerators. He had an unused warehouse and believed that since all he would have to do was assemble, there would be little capital needed for acquiring machinery. He discussed the idea with a friend, Mallam Adamu Ciroma. Ciroma opined that it was not such a good idea, as refrigerators were not what people bought on a daily basis. Ciroma advised that he should instead invest in what people consumed daily. He specifically mentioned biscuits and confectionery. The suggestion appealed to Adesoye and the idea of starting a refrigerator assembly plant was instantly dropped and replaced with that of producing biscuits. As fate would have it, a biscuit factory in Jos called Standard Biscuits was in dire financial straits and a friend in Offa, Alhaji Raji, brought this to Adesoye's notice. Some on the staff of Standard Biscuits had informed Alhaji Raji about the state of affairs in the company and with Adamu Ciroma's advice ringing in his head he saw an opening. Within a short space of time, he established Okin Biscuits Limited, locating the factory at Offa. There is no mystery around how he came about the name Okin (peacock). What the peacock

represents in Offa and by extension, represented for him is succinctly captured at the beginning of this book.

However, just as he experienced while setting out to begin his consultancy, once again, the naysayers surfaced. A certain crop of individuals to be forever cloaked in anonymity tried to discourage him. They even went to his mother. They asked her who would come to Offa to buy biscuits? His response to his mother when she conveyed their concerns to him was to tell her that biscuits were being produced in the UK and sent to Nigeria and people were buying, soaps were being produced there and sent to Nigeria and people were buying, Guarara milk and Guarara juice came from Brazil and so on. Why would people not buy his biscuits? As long as they were of top quality, people would buy. That was his response to the naysayers and propitiously, the Federal Government, under the leadership of General Olusegun Obasanjo, banned the importation of biscuits into Nigeria.

He employed the disgruntled management staff of Standard Biscuits to work for him at Okin. They formed the bedrock of the new company. He had his general manager hired long before the formal take-off of the factory. On his part, he procured a book published by the Confectionary Association of Europe, containing all the biscuit recipes available, studied it and armed himself with knowledge in biscuit making. If you wanted to

produce shortcake, coasters and so on, you could find the recipes for each in the book. The quantity of flour to use, sugar, glucose and essences was all contained in the book. By so doing, not only did he have an experienced workforce, at least at management level, also, he himself had become quite knowledgeable about biscuit making by the time production began. This made the take-off smooth sailing.

There was no formal or special groundbreaking ceremony done when work commenced on the site of the factory located at 16, Ajasse-Ipo Road, Ijagbo, Kwara State. One would have thought that such a momentous undertaking in a small town like Offa would have involved some pomp and ceremony, both secular and religious, but not at all. He was not interested in impressing anyone. The work was supervised by Adesoye himself, it was executed through direct labour and was done cheaply and quickly. Structures were raised within three months. He used what he described as tubular pipes for the structure. These would however, later split because of the heat in the factory, so during later expansion he did not repeat the use of these pipes. When production eventually began, the factory was producing at 150% of the installed capacity of the equipment. Baker-Perkins of Peterborough was the maker of the machinery. It was the most popular brand among industrialists in Nigeria at that time.

A funny thing happened during negotiations for the purchase of the equipment. Adesoye pretended as though he was just a buying agent and asked the marketing manager of the company how much the firm would pay him as commission, the man said ten per cent. Adesoye told him to remove it. When the manager asked why, Adesoye said it was his money and he would not steal from himself. It was after this that they started negotiating the cost of the equipment further downwards. The equipment was also very popular with some alhajis in Kano who were in the biscuit business. One of them was running three machines of the same make, producing nothing else but Gem biscuits. The equipment the alhaji used for packaging was what was referred to as flow-pillow-pack.

The first day of production at Okin Biscuits Adesoye was away, but samples were sent to him. They were also sent to his mother, to the palace, mosques and churches, and to beggars on the streets. He was excited in no small measure that the preparations and hard work done had yielded a satisfactory result. His mother gave the manager, Mr. Kishnadwalla and his wife one naira each when they visited her at home. The manager, an Indian, reflecting his beliefs, took the note and sealed it to the back of his chequebook with cello tape. He told Adesoye that from the time he did that, there was no shortage of money in the company.

The biscuits produced were comparable, if not better than imported ones. Okin used cellophane in the beginning, but due to environmental concerns the use of cellophane was banned internationally. So an alternative was sourced and they came up with Bi-oriented Polypropylene (BOPP), a by-product of crude oil. The imported ones trumped Okin in packaging sometimes, like those that were packaged in beautiful round tins, but if a company had tried that in Nigeria it would have gone bankrupt, as that kind of packaging was not produced in the country. When Okin Biscuits was about to begin production, he had instructed the general manager not to sell on credit. He added that whoever wanted to market the product must deposit at least five thousand naira to show that they were serious. It so happened that the government of the day banned the importation of biscuits into Nigeria, as earlier mentioned and this Adesoye attributed to providence. Okin and its distributors made tons of money.

The factory in no time revitalised the economy of Offa community. Simply put, most households in Offa felt the impact of Okin Biscuits. It was a huge employer of labour. Virtually every household in the north and south of the country knew the products of Okin Biscuits; regions where it had the greatest impact were the Southwest and North Central. It was served as a snack on planes travelling the length and breadth of the country. People

came to Offa from far-flung areas like Lagos, Kaduna, Jos and other parts of the country to purchase them. In those times, Offa was agog. Secondary distribution sources took the products all over West Africa, to Ghana, Lomé, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. Some even paid a premium for the opportunity to buy. It was the favourite of many schoolchildren. The brand was found even in regions where the company had no business partnership with distributors. The biscuits would go on to have a cultural impact on a generation of Nigerians.

Adesoye had four Indians working for him at the top management level at Okin Biscuits. Mr Kishnadwalla was his first Indian employee. He had come from Standard Biscuits, Jos. When Kishnadwalla arrived, the factory was not yet complete, so he came on board even while the factory was still being built. The four were the general manager, Kishnadwalla, the production manager and the electrical and mechanical section managers. One thing he did when it came to employing them was that he visited their country and went to their homes to learn more about them and to get to know them as intimately as possible. For several years, the factory operated three shifts of eight hours each daily, 365 days of the year.

Noble Breweries

The Kwara State government wanted to privatise its

brewery, Kwara Brewery. From research, they had found out that the brewery and Okin Biscuits shared the same railway line and were contiguous in boundaries. So for synergy, they decided that Okin Biscuits ought to be interested in the brewery. They approached Adesoye and his board with their proposal and he agreed. However, as negotiations were taking place, he encountered difficulties from friends and foes alike. Nothing new about that, he would have been surprised if he had encountered no opposition. The then Kwara State governor was keen on selling to him, but his cabinet opposed him. He was said to have remarked, "Is it not Adesoye? If it were a Lebanese there would have been no problem." He meant that some members of his cabinet were only opposing the idea because it involved Adesoye, but that the same people would have had no objection if he had been Lebanese. Nonetheless, the committee that was constituted to oversee the sale, in spite of their reluctance decided there was no going back, mainly because of the compelling argument of the potential synergy with the existing biscuit plant. Along the way, there were spurious speculations as to whether Adesoye would be able to raise enough money to seal the deal. That was not the only issue he had to contend with, the sellers gave an impossible timeframe within which to pay up (payment window). In one of the meetings, they asked if he had been able to find the money; that a certain

Idiagbon, also of supposed substantial clout, had shown interest in buying a textile mill off the government, but had ended up failing the payment terms. The insinuation was that Adesoye might end up doing the same. They really did not think he had the means to close the deal, which may boggle the mind and begs the question why they were then negotiating with him if they did not consider him serious. He recalled, "I asked if they wanted their money there and then. There was a female permanent secretary on the committee who appeared to believe in me. She replied, 'bring it, bring it.'" He then opened his briefcase and brought out the total amount they were asking for, in drafts. That was how the matter was resolved. They had doubted him, but he proved that he was a man always prepared and several steps ahead.

Adesoye College, Offa

Adesoye College, founded in 1987, belongs to the last era of Emmanuel Adesoye's adventures. Overcome by awe from reflections on his mythical sojourn and achievements, it was time to go beyond occasional acts of philanthropy to a concrete and lasting legacy, dedicated to the glory of God and benefit of the society at large.

Modern private initiatives in secondary school education were virtually non-existent in 1987. The decay in public education was already well entrenched in the country.

Economic decline was bleeding the sector of competent and dedicated hands. Sorely heart-wrenching values and the collapse of standards had permeated virtually every cadre of the education system in the country. Adesoye College stands as another first as a private response to the situation. It blazed a trail in another largely uncharted territory. Today, the private education sector has not only experienced a boom, it has also indeed arrived to save the nation's education sector from total collapse.

Groundwork commenced in 1986. Built through direct labour and supervised by Adesoye himself, the College can be described as a municipality spread over a land area of over 100 hectares in the government-reserved area of Offa that was previously a garrison for colonial soldiers. It has over five kilometres of primary and secondary road network and not only physical facilities fitting for learning and the comfort of the students, but also massive housing accommodation for all cadres of the management, teaching and ancillary staff. Infrastructural facilities include ample independent power and water supply and waste management systems. Fondly called 'the brick city' by its alumni, all the buildings are clad in natural clay bricks, initially specified to avoid high redecoration costs. Today, the college retains its uniquely natural and serene ambience provided by the clay brick cladding.

At the time of building the school, the use of bricks for building was not popular. When Adesoye told his architect that he would use bricks in the construction of the school, the architect, Janus Zeelonka, a Pole, got a certain Caleb from Kaduna who already had some training in brickwork. Caleb, in turn trained his assistants on how to point brick wall joints, which is a method of finishing for brick walls using mortar to fill the spaces between them. When the project was completed, Caleb did not return to Kaduna. He chose to stay back in Offa. This led to the influx of his kinsmen into the town and they have since become a part and parcel of Offa community.

At the inception of the idea to start the school, Adesoye had set up a committee that went through a rigorous planning exercise. Prince Lawal, then permanent secretary, Federal Ministry of Education, introduced them to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). From UNESCO was Dr Callaway, who wrote the first brief for the college with Mr. J. Ojo, who was the diocesan educational secretary of the Anglican Church. The brief included the menu for the students' meals. The school fee at inception was N5, 000 per annum. The committee also decided the names of the halls of accommodation, which were named after great Offa indigenes and members of his family.

Then the challenges came and they were not a few, but one in particular took the cake. Adesoye decided the college had to be sited in Offa and in the GRA particularly, to avoid any land disputes. It worked that way, as he got a place in the GRA, but a land dispute did ensue with the handwriting of a conspiracy to milk him of his money all over it. One of the beneficiaries of the situating of the college, Raimi Sogo, got greedy. He was not satisfied with what he had received from Adesoye and turned around to encourage the Ojomu family to sue him to court.

The trial was a long drawn out one, lasting over five years with great financial implications for Adesoye. Nevertheless, Adesoye emerged victorious. He won at the High Court, at the Court of Appeal and finally at the Supreme Court.

Adesoye Holdings

After Adesoye and Partners came Vulcan Gases, Kaduna and many other ventures sprung up after Vulcan Gases (how that initial venture came into existence has been explained already). Then came Okin Biscuits, Offa; Okin Foam, Offa; Okin Juice, Kaduna; Okin Plastics, Kaduna; Optus Furniture, Kaduna; Omicron International, Lagos; Laxamy Engineering, Kaduna; Supasteel, Kaduna, and Noble Breweries, Offa. There were also Tanko Ventures, Lagos; Babanla Agro Allied, Offa; Labande Farms,

Offa; Omicron Travels, Lagos; Interlate Printing and Packaging, Lagos; Okin Express, Kaduna; Salefour Limited, incorporated in the United Kingdom; First Nigeria Insurance, Kaduna, and FT Finance, Lagos. Major shareholding in the then Commerce Bank and Universal Trust Bank, Lagos; Okin Weekly, a tabloid published from Offa; Okin Cosmetics and Okin Security.

To manage all these companies a holding firm, Adesoye Holdings, was established in 1994 to oversee their running. It created one layer of management above all these subsidiaries, whereby it is the parent company with all the others subordinated to it in a subsidiary relationship. At the helm of the holding company are the chairman and the group-managing director.

One of the aims behind the choice of investments of the group was to achieve some form of backward vertical integration to increase the orbit of its control over the fortunes of the subsidiary companies. Interlate Printing and Packaging, for instance, was established to print the wrappers for Okin Biscuits and to manufacture the cartons for packaging the finished products. Letters of credit were facilitated by the banks in which the group held substantial interests, Omicron trading company would import the raw materials and Omicron International would clear them at the port and forward them through Tanko Ventures to the various subsidiary

companies for which the goods were imported. That way, timelines and budgets in the business plans were guaranteed. Unfavourable government policies, bank interest rates and loan tenures in particular, the collapse of infrastructure like road networks needed for cost effective and efficient distribution of goods and services, high cost of energy and also the unfettered entry of products and commodities from Southeast Asia, particularly those smuggled into the country, spelt doom for several of the group's interests from the late nineties. In many instances, it was also difficult to recapitalise the companies, given the wide spread of the group's activities.

Adesoye Holdings remains a company sitting atop a wide range of diversified interests in Nigeria and overseas, entering into joint ventures with new capital to revive many of its activities.

CHAPTER FOUR
FAMILY LIFE
CHIEF MRS COMFORT ADUKE
ADESOYE

Behind every successful man is a great woman. As in the good old game of Chess, the queen protects the king. If a good woman can be a man's best investment, perhaps for Emmanuel Olatunji Adesoye, it was Comfort Aduke Adesoye, nee Afolabi of Ile Oke Akingbasa, Offa.

The image we come away with from looking at the pair is that of the woman standing behind her man, ready for whatever may come. Prepared to stop him from falling in the face of sudden onslaught, prepared to bear the brunt should he fall and to push him back up to his feet. A constant presence, like a shadow. There is no denying that many powerful and successful men had their significant others always supporting them and Chief E.O Adesoye's story would probably not have been without

the woman who stood by him and supported him in all his ventures unequivocally.

Born on January 1 1940 into the Afolabi family of Offa, she was the youngest. Adesoye met Comfort when he was still at Offa Grammar School. One of his closest friends in Offa was Anthony Afolabi. Anthony, however, did not school in Offa. He attended St. Paul's Secondary School, Wusasa, Zaria, so they only met up whenever he was in Offa for the holidays. Anthony Afolabi had a younger sister who was the ward of their elder sister, who also lived in Zaria. Her name was Comfort Aduke Afolabi. They would usually come home for the Christmas holiday together. It was during one of these visits that Adesoye paid his friend a visit at their house and met his sister. He liked what he saw. He found her quite attractive and he made his intentions known to his friend. From that minute on, Anthony, became the go-between for Adesoye and his sister. People like him were called 'messengers of peace' in those days. Adesoye would write a letter and Afolabi would pass it on to his sister, who would then reply to Adesoye in the same manner. They were still students, but at a certain stage in their back and forth, he proposed to her and she agreed to marry him. She later relocated from Zaria to Kano to live with another elder sister of hers. When Adesoye went to Kano for an entrance examination to the medical school, he visited her and her sister, Mrs Ojo.

Adesoye gave her three shillings. He felt some sense of accomplishment from being able to do so. He found out later that his sweetheart had not been quite impressed; even though she was grateful (she never stopped teasing him about it!). Comfort moved again with her sister and her family, this time to Kaduna. Since Adesoye was already working in Kaduna at that time, it became much easier for them to see each other. Comfort spent most of her childhood and adolescence living with different sisters. She assisted them in their business ventures and with domestic chores while at the same time going to school. One can therefore understand why it was that she was never comfortable being idle, as will become obvious as her story unfolds.

When Adesoye transferred to London to continue his education, they kept up correspondence with each other and when he was through with his studies, she went to join him in London and there they were married. Adesoye was comfortable enough to support the two of them while they were there, but Comfort insisted on working. She had trained as a teacher back home in Nigeria at St. Peter's Kaduna, before she went to join Adesoye in the United Kingdom. Besides, she was also used to staying busy. Adesoye disagreed with her. He told her she would not work in the UK. Instead, he enrolled her in a fashion-training institute called Paris Academy of Fashion on Oxford Street in the West End of London.

His office was at Hanover Square, which was just at the back of her school. Between her school and his place of work, there was a shop called Woolworths and they would meet there for lunch and to catch up on each other's day, after which they would go their separate ways again. Adesoye's employer gave her staff luncheon vouchers. Adesoye described it as an initiative conceived by the Labour Party, which was then in government, to provide food subsidy for workers. It was an initiative that Adesoye lauded and considered a winning one – an early indicator of his persuasion.

Adesoye and Comfort kept their courtship in London so under the radar that his assistant who served as a technical support to him, a Sri Lankan named Suanita Palihapitiya, did not believe him when he told her he was getting married. She was not aware that he was in a relationship and had seen nothing to indicate that he was. He also shielded himself from the rest of his colleagues. He maintained a low profile and so they were shocked when they received the invitation to his wedding. They did not believe it. He believed they showed up at his wedding primarily to see if he was indeed getting married. The church in which he and Comfort got married was about a twenty-minute walk from their flat. He had been stringent in managing his finances and so had enough money to fund the wedding. He paid for his wife's dress, his own outfit and the best man's. He also

paid for all the bridesmaids' and the chief bridesmaid's outfits. They were driven to church in a limousine he hired; it cost one pound one shilling per hour. Except for his boss who was absent, all his colleagues were present, even if it was just to ascertain that it was really happening. The reception held in the adjoining church hall. He remembered going to Liverpool Street to buy live chicken, which they cooked and served at home. It was such a joyful day for both of them. B.B Eleshin was Adesoye's best man. As fate would have it, their wives fell pregnant at the same period and their children were born about an hour apart. His child came before Adesoye's. He had a girl. Adesoye had a boy.

While Comfort was pregnant with their first child, he told her not to work, but she insisted she would. She wanted to make extra money. Eventually, he allowed her to. Then one day the weather was really bad and the fog was very thick. One could not see beyond about three feet ahead. There was so much pollution in London at that time. Well, on her way back from work, she came out of the tube station, took a wrong turn and lost her way. She went around in circles for almost an hour before she finally found her way home. She was in tears when she got home and when she narrated her ordeal, he said, "I told you so." That experience put an end to that job. The memory of that incident soon faded, however, along with the trauma of it and she began itching to get

another job. Once again, her husband yielded to her pressure. London was not a place to laze about on a job or be shoddy at or tardy to work. Not that she was, but lethargy walks hand-in-hand with pregnancy. Her duty was to iron clothes that had been laundered. She lasted only a few hours, as she burnt one of the clothes she was ironing and was terminated. When this happened, she finally yielded to her husband's desire that she should not work outside the home. Moreover, when their first child arrived, she had her hands full looking after him.

The birth of their first child was a difficult one. It required a caesarean section. The procedure was successful but debilitating. Comfort was unable to sleep for three days after the operation. Her husband was informed that her inability to sleep was quite worrisome, because everything had been done to make her sleep still, she could not. She narrated to her husband how an old white woman on a trolley had visited her and another woman who was sharing the recovery room with her and had made a strange sign over her head. Strangely, when she had asked about a certain old nurse in the morning from other nurses she was told there was no one that fit the description she had given on their nursing staff. They were never able to solve that mystery.

Then on the third day while he was visiting her, she suddenly fell asleep. The doctor asked him not to wake

her. She slept for two days and the baby was kept in the nursery where he received excellent care. Adesoye regarded her falling asleep as a miracle, but did not know what to make of all that had gone on before.

Upon their return to Nigeria, she worked briefly as a teacher and then opened a boutique. She had a motorbike she used to get about town when she was teaching. She also had more babies, three more to be precise, another boy and then two girls. It has been mentioned how, when her husband decided to leave his job in the Civil Service, she had given him her unflinching support. When his enterprise began to grow requiring more of her husband's attention, in fact consuming the larger portion of his time and energy, she held the fort impeccably. She was not one to over-indulge her children. While she occasionally took them out to eat and took them to visit parks, she also disciplined them when necessary. She made sure they had a balanced life, a balanced view of things. She saw to it that they kept up with their studies and closely monitored their performance in school. Of course, as a trained teacher she expected her children to be model students. She punished failure in schoolwork or disobedience with the whip.

In spite of the enormous wealth at their disposal, she taught her children to be contented. They lived an understated lifestyle. Of course, they attended good

schools and had a high quality lifestyle, but they were not flamboyant. If they wanted to go out, she took them out. The children were not even aware of how wealthy their parents were. They knew they were comfortable, but theirs was not an ostentatious lifestyle. For example, if they wanted a drink between meals and she allowed it, they would share a bottle of Fanta. She was also not the type who put maids at their beck and call. They had their chores and they dared not come short. She had a gardener and house help, but that did not stop her from giving the children chores to do. She vetted their friends and they could not go visiting just as they wished.

Chief Comfort Aduke was the stabilising force in the house. The children reserved their open displays of affection for her. She was her children's confidante. She was mainly Chief's face to the children and she was her husband's sounding board. She supported his dreams. Whatever his aspiration she was right behind him. She handled his finances. She was the sole signatory to an account where most of the money that came in was deposited. He trusted her absolutely, financially. They were openly affectionate with each other. She made sure his meal was ready whenever he came home to eat. She would leave her office before midday and go home to prepare his meal. At meal times, everyone would be at the dining table, except for when Chief was unavoidably absent, or not in town. They would joke at the dinner

table and tease each other, to their children's delight. The atmosphere was always a warm one within the home for the children, except if one of them had fallen short and knew that he or she was in for some scolding. It was not idyllic or picture perfect, but she ran a home that was real and filled with lots of laughter. Her husband protected her. He gave her authority over the household, absolute authority. Not for him the typical African behaviour of having an in-law come in and walk roughshod over his wife and children. She was in charge of the house. Adesoye shielded his wife and children from the politics that often plague the extended family system.

She was also a hard worker, very enterprising. She had her fashion business, Aduks Fashion Centre, named after herself. It was a successful enterprise that became a household name in Kaduna city and the go-to place for the wealthy residents of the city for their sartorial needs. She renamed it Silver Line after a fire incident destroyed the entire shop and its wares. She was devastated, but gathered herself and with her husband's support rebuilt and rose from the ashes, literally, as a 'Silver Line' over a grey sky. She was also a praying woman who believed in and loved God. She was active in the church. She was charitable; she helped whoever came her way in need of help. She was a counsellor to many younger married women. By virtue of her position as the wife of a powerful man, she attracted people from all sorts of backgrounds.

She also drew many by the strength of her personality. She was firm and honest. She was straightforward, but always made sure to present her points with tact. She also bridged the gap between Chief and his employees.

She was sociable, even if her natural disposition did not tend towards outgoing. She hosted many a gathering in their house, the Inner Circle gathering (Inner Circle was a social club set up by her husband and a group of friends with similar tastes) and the Offa Parapo (Offa parapo refers to the gathering of Offa indigenes resident in Kaduna). When these parties or meetings were over and the attendees had all departed, she would package the untouched leftover food and send it off with an escort and a driver to the nooks and crannies of the city to be given to beggars. She thought about everybody. It was her practice to dispense largesse to her husband's employees, often without his knowledge and she gave out material gifts to many. According to various views, she was an embodiment of the Proverbs 31 woman. Many claim to be, but she truly embodied that ideal, a blessing within and without. She was her husband's best friend, the one who knew him completely according to him. Her death created a void that was never filled. It was as if his aura of invincibility had been stripped off.

Fatherhood

His first child, a boy, was born in 1965 in London. The

second, another son, was born about fourteen months later in Nigeria. Then came two girls, after whom he and his wife 'sang their Ebenezer'. All his children excelled academically. The eldest is an engineer and then there are two qualified architects and a medical doctor. All are also very comfortable in their chosen careers. He was immensely proud of them, declaring that God had been gracious to him with good children.

As a parent raising young children, Adesoye was not the demonstrative type. However, he was the present type. He was available. His presence dominated life in the household, but he was not domineering. He was gentle when he needed to be, but firm when it was required of him. He was also very busy. His family was quite young when he was establishing his businesses, but he lived the moments with his children and made sure to create beautiful memories for them as much as he could. When they were together, he gave them his undivided attention. He would take walks with them to get updates on what was going on in their lives, which really was how they were getting on at school. His main area of concern with them was their academics. He could not live with the thought of them performing poorly at all. He discussed their studies with them and helped them wherever they may have been coming short. One time his eldest daughter was studying for her finals and could not seem to make any headway. When he heard about it, he

remembered he had faced a similar problem and advised her to take a break. Whoever performed excellently in their schoolwork among his children received a great reward. Any child that fell short also received his or her due rebuke.

He took them out whenever he had the chance to. He would take them to the stadium to watch football. Sometimes, he took them to inspect his on-going projects. They went out for lunch occasionally on Sundays after church. Whenever he travelled out of the country, he would return with presents for them. He protected his family, in as much as it depended on him. While he was a firm believer in alajobi, meaning that he recognised the importance of the extended family, in oneness with the larger family and did not stop his relatives from visiting, he made sure that there were boundary lines. They were always received with a warmly, but he shielded his wife and children from the politics that potentially played out within the setting of the extended family.

Then his wife died in November 1997. The children were grown. The first two were married, the third had graduated from the university and the last was in the university. Fate dealt him a hard blow. Death, it seemed, had a way of snatching his most treasured companions away from him at critical stages. He had faced the same situation at a very young age with the loss of his father,

but his mother had been there. She had filled the void created by his father's passing the best way she could. But who would fill this void? This was his partner in all his endeavours. She had shared his dream and vision and helped him bring them to reality. She was his bedrock, his prayer warrior and spiritual anchor. After the passing of his wife, he retired to Offa. He dialled down his business activities and gave himself more to his community. He became more involved in the Offa Descendants Union (ODU) and other community matters. Apparently, that was his way of coping with the irreplaceable loss.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMMUNITY SERVICE

THE OFFA DESCENDANTS UNION (ODU)

Adesoye was a quintessential Offa man, indeed bearing every appearance of one. It was in response to the impassioned appeal of a one-time governor to Kwara indigenes resident in Kaduna, during a visit to that city, to return home to develop their state that he decided to set up his factories in Offa. However, he continued to live principally in Kaduna, paying only occasional visits to Offa. It was the passing away of his wife, however, that sealed his retreat to Offa permanently. He left Kaduna, returned to Offa and immersed himself in community service. Earlier, in the narrative of his early life in Lagos, the Offa Descendants Union (ODU) was mentioned and it was revealed that Abraham Adesoye, Adesoye's father was a founding member. One of the most enduring achievements of the union was the founding of the first community secondary school in Nigeria, Offa Grammar School, which was Adesoye's alma mater.

His mentor, Chief Dr. Duro Soley, was president of the union for about ten years and throughout the years Dr. Soley was president, Adesoye worked with him and was able to observe how the union functioned at close quarters, the internal politics and so on. Therefore, when he was approached to take up the presidency once the tenure of Professor Oyawoye, another prominent Offa indigene expired, Adesoye was sufficiently prepared to take charge of the reins. Before agreeing to the request however, he gave the committee handling the transition the following terms and conditions:

- i. To consult his family
- ii. To consult the youth
- iii. To consult the elders
- iv. And that if there was going to be an election, they must carry all the branches throughout the country along, before he would accept. Additionally, if there were any dissenting voices from any of the branches, he would not accept the post

The Transition Committee promised that his conditions would be met and the night before the election, a reception was held, during which delegates made pledges. However, contrary to what was agreed upon at the reception, when

voting started, one of the delegates decided to go against what had already been decided. But when he saw that he was the only dissenting voice, he voted in favour of Adesoye's candidature. Papa Lanioye, who was the returning officer, when announcing the results said the election was the most peaceful ever conducted in the history of the union at that time.

The first task he set for himself as the ODU president was to familiarise himself with all of the branches of the union. He took a tour to everywhere Offa indigenes had made home within and outside Nigeria. The tour was a remarkable success. Notwithstanding the usual internal divisions and wrangling that come with any human association, he was able to surmount most of them, all with a lasting impact. Perhaps his success was, most likely, not unconnected with the fact that he bore the financial burden of all his activities for the union himself. His tenure as the president recorded quite a number of achievements. An account of the more remarkable ones includes:

- ❖ Extensive tour across the length and breadth of the country to ascertain the problems of the union
- ❖ Increasing the number of branches of the union from 36 to 58
- ❖ Reviving the non-active women's wing

- ❖ Zoning the ODU into two, namely the Northern and Western Zones, with necessary structures for them for better management
- ❖ Purchase of vehicles for vigilantes to boost security and maintain peace and order
- ❖ Strict supervision of ODU-supported schools to restore their lost glory
- ❖ Spearheaded the reconciliation of members of the ODU branches who had been at loggerheads from way before his tenure
- ❖ Laid the foundation and raised funds for the building of an ultra-modern hall for the Abeokuta branch
- ❖ Renovation of the Fine Art Department of Offa Grammar School
- ❖ Renovation of the Amenity Ward of Offa Specialist Hospital by the Okene branch
- ❖ Birth of the Ijakadi newspaper, a publication aimed at educating and keeping Offa indigenes at home and abroad abreast of the activities of the community

Posterity will certainly remain kind in its assessment of his leadership, which today may be judged as the most

impactful the union has ever had both within and beyond Offa.

Church and Local Organisations

While living in Kaduna, Adesoye attended St. Michael's Anglican Church. On retiring to Offa, he returned to the Iyeru Okin African Church, Offa that he had attended as a child. His father had been a faithful member and when he was transferred to Lagos, the family had attended a branch of the church, Bethel African Church. Upon the death of his father and their relocation to Offa, the family returned to Iyeru Okin. Adesoye was the Baba Egbe (president) of the choir, the Asiwaju Okunrin (men's leader), a member of the Christian League Society and Baba Egbe of the BCB society.

He believed in God and professed his belief. However, he detested religious contestations. He never allowed himself to become drawn into any. He kept his faith personal and willingly performed duties and obligations placed upon him. He fraternised with both Christians and Muslims and contributed as much as he could in support of the two religions. He was happy to sponsor Christian and Muslim faithful on pilgrimages to their respective holy lands. He singlehandedly funded the building of a church at Ajegunle, a place on the outskirts of Offa and contributed generously towards the building of a mosque within the same local government. He financially aided

the building of many churches scattered around Offa. He was totally committed to the mission of the Church. In obedience to a personal revelation he had received from God, he started a fellowship at the chapel in his country home, Olorunkuse House, in February 2007, with a vision of gathering believers from all denominations to offer thanksgiving to Almighty God. This fellowship held every Sunday evening and continues to hold even after his death.

Politics and Philanthropy

Chief was brave with his facts and position on matters. He was a man given to telling things as he saw it. Thus, for him, the open political sphere was one he mostly avoided. Besides, political power was never a thing he openly desired and the persistent meddling in the polity by the military contributed to his apathy and preference for self-preservation. There was absolutely no guarantee that an administration would complete its term and there was also the terrifying habit of a military takeover, followed by inquests. Should one be suspected of having hobnobbed with any member of the toppled government, one might end up in jail for offenses that were usually spurious and their properties confiscated. However, while he abhorred politics and the entire charade that played out within it, he held an active interest in what happened in the political sphere,

he was politically conscious. This is hardly surprising as politicians run the country, conceive and implement policies with immediate and inescapable impact on the citizenry.

Adesoye was silently generous and humane. His siblings were the first beneficiaries of his altruism. All through his time in the tertiary institution, notwithstanding his young age, he faithfully set aside a portion of his bursary for his siblings back at home. He tasked himself to find means through which he could help lighten the financial burden his mother bore to raise him and his siblings.

While he did not suffer fools, he gladly assisted anyone that needed help. That notwithstanding, he knew where to draw the line. For instance, there was a time he was invited to make a donation at the same event twice. He had earlier made his donation and on the day of the event proper, he went late hoping they would have finished. To his chagrin they began eulogising him, singing that the one they had been waiting for had finally arrived. When he was called upon to speak, what he said was, “E fe pa kete kete ni?” (meaning, Do you want to kill the donkey?). Other philanthropists took a cue from this and began to use it whenever they felt overwhelmed by those asking for donations.

He started a foundation named after his late father,

the Abraham Adesoye Foundation, to help indigent students in tertiary institutions and solely funded the foundation for upwards of twenty years. Widows and orphans had their own special funds set aside by him. He, understandably, had a soft spot for them. The sick and physically challenged also featured highly on the list of his beneficiaries.

Honours, Chieftaincy Titles and Awards

In the year 1977, the then Olofa of Offa created the Mayeloye chieftaincy title specifically for Adesoye, in recognition of his groundbreaking achievements, the contribution of his efforts to uplift Offa and his dedication to the cause of Offa people. In the year 1999, he was conferred with the title of Asiwaju Offa (foremost personality in Offa) by the then Olofa of Offa and was conferred with the Officer of the Order of Niger (OON) by the Babangida government and a Commander of the Order of Niger (CON) by the Abacha government. He was also honoured by several other communities in Offa and beyond. However, he preferred to live out of sight. The whole idea of coveting titles from all over the place was foreign to his nature.

CHAPTER SIX

PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Before the unfortunate loss of his wife and his return to Offa, Adesoye had established himself as a force within the Kaduna community. His sphere of influence spread beyond just the Offa Parapo, a collection of Offa indigenes with whom Adesoye interacted in Kaduna and which he nurtured (they often gathered in his home). He had also become a known quantity within the top echelon of the Kaduna social elite. This circle was a blended mix of powerful political figures, top civil servants, captains of industry and the top brass of the military, both serving and retired. He referred to them as a kaleidoscope of friends. Amongst them was M.T Usman, a great engineer from the North. There was Alhaji Musa Bello from Numan, who lived across the road from him at 18 Sultan Road in Kaduna, generally regarded the head of the Kaduna Mafia (a brief narrative about which shall be attempted later). A

mechanical engineer named Alhaji Bayi, who, according to Chief Adesoye contributed to the knowledge of bomb making during the Civil War and was after the war aptly posted to the Defence Industry Corporation of Nigeria. Alhaji Dodo Mustapha was a mechanical engineer with multiple capabilities. He re-enacted how he had gotten members of staff reluctant to go on transfer to budge. He would arrange for a fake sacrifice on a person's seat. This act spurred the reluctant individual into action. He ended up as chief engineer at the Department of Works at the Ahmadu Bello University.

There was Lawyer Abdullahi Ibrahim, who was also his legal adviser for over 22 years. For many years, Lawyer Abdullahi never charged him a penny for his services, save for the brief for the legal tussle over the college land for which he was paid as invoiced by his chambers. A funny incident that Chief recalls occurred before the trial commenced. Lawyer Abdullahi went to stay with Adesoye in his house at Offa. At that time, one of his staff was a physical fitness coach and an expert at treating athletes, especially footballers. Adesoye asked if the lawyer would like to relax and told the man to treat them to an exercise routine. For the lawyer the experience was so painful that he never agreed to it again until he finished his assignment and left.

Other colleagues and friends were Justice Uwais who would later become the chief justice of the Federation and Adewale

Bello, one of the foremost builders of his time. There was General Jemibewon, who had also been his junior at Offa Grammar School; he was a general in the army and a one-time governor of the old Oyo State. General Adeyinka Adebayo, the then governor of the old Western State, was introduced to Adesoye by Architect Dokun Adeyemi. After he left his position as governor and was transferred to the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), Zaria, he had felt that Adesoye's presence in Kaduna only about an hour away from Zaria would be beneficial to the general. Architect Dokun told the general that if he ever needed anything, he should go to see Adesoye. Their friendship soon blossomed. There was a certain lawyer in Jos, Tunde Belgore, who was also a friend. Whenever he was in Kaduna, he would assume Adesoye's identity and go ahead to cause all sorts of mayhem. However, before leaving town, he would faithfully come to Adesoye to report himself.

Dr. Mahmud Tukur was a very close friend. Detribalised and much focused, he was once a vice chancellor of Bayero University, Kano. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo during his first tenure as president and in his quest for ethnic diversity of the composition of postings in the academia posted him to the University of Lagos as vice chancellor. Mahmud, however, refused to go, citing lack of understanding of the terrain of Lagos, where the business interests outside the walls of the university competed for the attention of most of the lecturers and the senior staff. He not only declined the posting, he

resigned from his post in Kano and moved to Kaduna. A story Adesoye narrated to demonstrate the closeness between him and Mahmud Tukur goes thus:

“I followed Mahmud Tukur to the turbanning ceremony of his senior brother. We drove through several towns throughout the night from my house. By the time we got to Jos it was already getting dark, but we did not stop. We continued that journey until we got to Jada in Adamawa State, travelling at a very high speed. The following day in the morning, we had to rest and wait for Mahmud Tukur’s brother to be turbaned, which was a short ceremony followed by a social gathering later in the evening. A stage was constructed for the ceremony and I was shocked by the grandeur of it all. The guests wouldn’t dance, but each family would have its team dancing before it and would ‘spray’ money as each team danced, starting with the lower denomination of Naira to the highest at that time. There was an agent collecting the money. I did my own spraying, though I could not match others. When the singer heard that I came from Offa, he remembered a certain prince from Offa nicknamed ‘Controller’, who later became the Olofa.”

Mahmud's father, the elder Tukur, was the richest man in his domain, but distributed everything to the less privileged. As far as he was concerned, he had educated his children sufficiently and they should, therefore, be able to fend for themselves. Among his children well known to Adesoye were Dr. Mahmud Tukur, later vice chancellor of Bayero University, Kano; Haman Tukur an electrical engineer who was rector of Kaduna Polytechnic and later minister for Mines and Power and Bamanga Tukur, who was comptroller, Nigerian Ports Authority. He would later join politics and become the chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) under the administration of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. Another friend that would also later become chairman of the PDP during the second coming of Chief Obasanjo was Colonel Ahmadu Ali of the 'Ali must go' fame in the late seventies.

A mythical conception of these highly visible and influential personalities referred to as the Kaduna Mafia soon evolved. Much has been written about them, but one thing was clear, they were philosophically different from the universally recognised Italian or American Mafia. This group, from formal literature, worked for the "defence and advocacy of Northern interests as well as individual business interests"¹. They appeared to have had their greatest successes under the military

¹ Forrest, Politics and Economic Development, 57

regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo (Rtd). Many of its members held key positions and leveraged these to secure patronage for friends and associates. The term 'Kaduna Mafia' was quite popular in the media, with many real and imagined acts ascribed to them. Adesoye was very much in with this group and they were said to have wielded a great deal of influence at various times over the Federal Military Government.

Inner Circle

Adesoye was prominent in other social circles. The 'Inner Circle' was one of them. The club comprised people from varied walks of life and was founded by Dr. Kola Olafimihan in Kaduna, to satisfy the social needs of younger couples, mostly from the southwestern part of the country, who sought to improve the social scene to match what their contemporaries in the South were up to.

Apparently, the social scene in Kaduna was cast in a conservative mould in general and somewhat restrictive and stale for the crop of young professionals of that time. Dr. Kola and his wife were great lovers of music and dancing and wanted an avenue where they could enjoy the two without drama. They reached out to other young and upwardly mobile minds and the idea was welcomed with great enthusiasm. There were just about twenty members in all. The inaugural gathering of the club was held at Dr. Kola Olafimihan's residence. It turned out to be a roaring party where everyone

had a jolly time. The next significant meeting was held at the residence of Femi Adeganye at the Central Bank Quarters in Kaduna, where he then lived. The party coincided with the departure of Dr. Kola Olafimihan on transfer to Ilorin and so doubled as a farewell party for him and his wife.

The club had no constitution guiding it, it was not formally organised. They were no hard and fast rules and no formal ceremony was observed whenever they met. It was simply a gathering of people with common views trying to recreate scenes of places they had left behind in a new environment. After the party celebrating Dr. Olafimihan's transfer, Adesoye became the president of the club. This came about by a curious method. He told everyone present that, "By section 6 of the constitution (which of course was non-existent) I hereby impose myself as president of the club." The announcement was received with bacchanalian glee. No one raised any objection, because it was obvious to everyone present that by appointing himself as such, Adesoye had implicitly submitted himself to bear the bulk of the club's financial burden. Another friend, Alhaji Bajehson, also announced himself as the social chairman and Architect Adeyemi imposed himself as secretary.

Such was the success and the fame of the club among the young and upwardly mobile living in Kaduna that people from Zaria (which was about an hour's drive away from Kaduna) joined. They were referred to as the Zaria Contingent, made

up of notable and respectable men and women such as Ms. Oyelude and Mrs Aina, matrons of hospitals in Zaria. A meeting/party was at one stage held in Zaria for the benefit of those that lived there. All the members resident in Kaduna drove over for the party. Some friends living in Lagos who were also young professionals once tried to organise a tour of the North to coincide with the date of one of the club's weekend parties. Unfortunately, it did not succeed.

Eventually the Inner Circle Club was dissolved after it became embroiled in internal wrangling that no one seemed able to manage. During its short existence, however, the club did not only indulge in epicurean delights. It carried out some empowerment work, financed through levies on each member and it maintained a tradition of taking out a newspaper page during Christmas to felicitate with everyone. At the end, Adesoye moved a motion for the dissolution of the club and not one single member present protested.

Kinkino Crescent

21A Kinkino Crescent housed a private guest facility that Adesoye supplied and maintained for his friends, associates and acquaintances that came in from outside Kaduna. According to him, he discovered that it was not always convenient for a family to receive guests in their home. Some of these guests also did not like to stay in hotels. The guesthouse was fully furnished, well equipped and complete with cooks and stewards always on hand

to prepare food and look after the guests. One of the VIP guests who stayed there was a former governor of Benue State, Reverend Father Adasu. He had been invited to a meeting in Kaduna, but the convener could not provide him with suitable accommodation for his purpose. Therefore, instead of lodging in a hotel, he stayed at the guesthouse. Father Adasu ended up a regular lodger after that and soon he became a close friend of Adesoye. That was not the only time Adesoye became friends with someone who happened to have stayed at the guesthouse; it happened again after he hosted the friends of Dr. Ona Soley's son at the guesthouse. Dr Soley's son was having his Passing out Parade at the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) in Kaduna and friends and family had come all the way from Abeokuta to celebrate with him. However, there was a dilemma over where the fourteen friends of the graduate who had come along with the family would stay. A mutual friend had reached out to Adesoye on Dr. Soley's behalf and without hesitation, he had invited them to stay at his guesthouse at no cost to them. Dr. Soley and Adesoye became very close after that, to the extent that Dr. Soley was made a member of the board of Adesoye Holdings. While the guesthouse was ostensibly dedicated to Adesoye and his friends to unwind, clearly, many serious negotiations and strategic business moves were made and many a contract concluded within its non-threatening confines.

The guesthouse was only five minutes away from Adesoye's

house on Sultan Road. To prevent any form of embarrassment, wives were literally barred from the place. However, one day his wife and her group of friends paid them a courtesy call. They presented as men by wearing trousers. This caught Adesoye and his guest unawares and sent him into a fit of laughter when he recovered from his shock. The death of his wife and his subsequent retreat to Offa forced the sun of the Kinkino Crescent phenomenon to its final setting.

Chief and Popular Culture

It was not always work for Chief and his downtime was not always spent on coming up with business strategies. He had an eclectic taste in music. He enjoyed both the old and the new. He enjoyed musicals like the Sound of Music starring Julie Andrews, classics like Handel's Messiah and the theme song of The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. TV series the Love Boat's theme song was also a favourite. He loved listening to Madonna's rendition of Don't Cry for Me Argentina from the film Evita and enjoyed Michael Jackson's Thriller. The theme for the opening sequence of the BBC sports programme as well. He was a collector of the video recording of every BBC Olympic sports programme, until recently when he stopped purchasing them. He enjoyed Contemporary Gospels songs like Days of Elijah by Donnie McClurkin, particularly the refrain "Behold he comes..." He loved watching Moment of Truth anchored by Pastor Tunde Bakare, senior pastor of the Latter Rain Assembly, which airs on Channels Television at

5pm every Sunday. Incidentally, Channels Television was his favourite Nigerian broadcast station.

On the local scene, he was partial to songs from the likes of Ebenezer Obey, especially O Nu Omije Mi Nu Pata Pata and Ko Si Ogbon to Le Da. The latter became his mantra when people wanted to abuse his generosity. He liked Sunny Ade's Ki Ale San Mi Ju Osan, especially the refrain "Ki gbogbo aye mi ko dun." He enjoyed Fuji music too. Tope Alabi, the well-known Yoruba Gospel singer was also a favourite. Her solo Angeli Mi resonated with him. The music of Mamman Shata and Dan Maraya Jos were also among his favourites.

Cherished TV programmes were the BBC comedy Yes, Minister, its spin-off Yes, Prime Minister and American series Dallas. One of his most cherished films was Jungle Book. He loved listening to Abba Zorro on Radio Nigeria. He called him the 'Golden Voice'. Zorro was a newscaster; Adesoye said everyone followed the one o' clock news because of him. He also loved to hear the voice of the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first president of Nigeria.

The Allure of India and Indians

India and her people fascinated Adesoye. His first set of employees when he set up Okin Biscuits was Indians. He spoke of interesting parallels in India and Nigeria. One of which was the teeming population, albeit on a smaller scale, second was that they are usually well travelled,

their respective nations being unable to absorb the number of qualified hands churned out each year. These people therefore, set out in search of greener pastures and they are usually in great demand wherever they settle.

Indians constituted the bulk of Okin Biscuits' expatriate staff, all in the technical cadre. He made certain to know them personally and this entailed travelling to their hometowns to meet their families. He visited each of their homes, much to the amazement of their parents and relations.

The first time he went to India was with his wife to see the Taj Mahal, the renowned monument built by a Mughal emperor to house the tomb of his favourite wife who died during the birth of her tenth child. The beautiful symphony of the architecture of the walls, in his own words, was what impressed him the most. After that visit, he began visiting India every six months. To him, India was a fascinating country, "poor over all, yet very rich." The rich spent money lavishly; their weddings were always a spectacle. The rich on some occasions rode on the back of an elephant elaborately decorated with garlands. The most opulent hotel he found was the hotel Taj in Bombay. At their local markets, one could find the part of anything mechanical and at a giveaway price. Adesoye recounted that he got a machine repair kit for peanuts. He reminisced quite often about his trip to Bangalore with his wife and the beautiful moments they spent together. Where she could not buy goods to bring back

to Nigeria to sell, she lost interest in that place. She loved gold and invested in lots of it.

He had what he called a great escape once when he was in India for a meeting. There was some delay with his flight and he was becoming quite distressed that he was going to miss the meeting. Only for him to arrive much later and to his horror learn that the hotel booked for him and the other delegates had, while his flight had been delayed, suffered a fire outbreak and lives had been lost.

India was some sort of an eye opener for Adesoye. Prior to discovering India, his sights had been focused on Europe for technology and staffing for his industrial and other commercial enterprises. India, however, represented technology far more adaptable to the Nigerian environment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CURTAIN CALL

On Saturday, December 2 2017 at about 11pm, Adesoye roused from a peaceful slumber, refreshed. He had fallen asleep to the evocative yet soothing voice of one his favourite Gospel singers, Tope Alabi. He called to one of his staff and asked for a meal, a local staple that is regarded as the ‘king of food’ amongst the Yoruba. Sadly, what he desired was not readily available, he thus settled for an alternative (curiously one totally unrelated in likeness to what he initially craved). Had there been any clear sign that this would be his last meal, perhaps those around him might have exerted themselves to get it prepared. Unfortunately, no one had any inkling that this great man wanted a celebratory meal to usher him into the world beyond.

Juju maestro Sunny Ade was one of Adesoye's favourite musicians and a particular song of his resonated with him as the years went by. It goes thus: "K'ale san mi ju osan, ki osan mi dara ju owuro lo", meaning, may the latter days of my life surpass the former. One might say his desire was granted, as here was a man who had fully lived out his life. How do we begin to describe him? How do we capture the essence of this rare breed? What really used to go on in his head?

For many, a mystique surrounded his persona. He was typical and atypical, depending on the situation in which he found himself. When asked to describe him, respondents would usually come up with somewhat cliché responses such as he was hardworking and rich, kind hearted, a good person, and on and on, trying but ultimately failing to capture succinctly what made him different.

As the saying goes, however, you sow a thought you reap a deed. If thoughts sowed become deeds, then what is the origin of a man's thoughts? What benevolent spirits were speaking thoughts, ideas and rare insights into Adesoye's mind? As man has a set of physical senses for contact with the physical plane, so does he also have other inner senses for contact with the inner, invisible planes of nature. Perhaps it is in these invisible worlds that we must look for the forces and mechanisms that

are necessary to explain much that happens in the outer, visible world. The invisible worlds then are the worlds of causes and the outer physical world is one of effects.

If thoughts come to us seemingly out of nowhere, then we must have some kind of 'receiving set' with some sort of antenna and internal, unseen faculties to pick them up and convey them to our consciousness. Since these faculties are not possessed by the average individual, those who are gifted with such capacity are said to be endowed with extra sensory perception. They are considered supernormal or superhuman, particularly when their achievements in the real world clearly break the boundaries of average humans in their lifetime. Such people do exist. Adesoye was one of them. They travel this earthly plane every once in a long while. What made Adesoye different did not so much come from the story of anything he did in particular or any company, enterprise or endeavour he established or undertook.

The riddle is in how, from 1979 to 1997, he launched into what then appeared to be a limitless series of successful investments in industrial enterprise, establishing one factory after the other, creating material conditions culminating in a self-sustaining cycle of growth and expansion from consultancy in construction to sectors spanning manufacturing, banking and finance, insurance, hospitality, transportation and logistics, local

and international trade, education, agriculture, oil and gas services and the media. World-class quality and instant success stood each venture apart. By the late eighties, he sat atop a rather vast business empire not quite rivalled by any other player in the private sector in Nigeria at that time.

Olorunkuse House, his retirement home, stands as a testament to and a symbol of his exceptionality. Opening the expansive country home at Offa in 1994 sealed the larger than life myth already far gone in its making, itself another glimpse into his complicated makeup. Olorunkuse House perhaps subtracted from his outward preference for a quiet life, out of sight. Olorunkuse House, however, was inevitable. It remains perhaps the most prominent concrete expression of the vast expanse of his capacity to dream and to bring such to reality.

It sits on an ascent, its towering size making it visible from a distance, the connotation of power, wealth and prestige. Not many would have conceived the thought of erecting something as grand, but he did. It took about nine years to finish the house, an illustration of the force and tenacity of his will. Not once did he fear that he would have to abandon the project. He kept at it, stone upon stone, block upon block, day after day until what he had envisioned became concrete. And there he lived out the rest of his days.

Adesoye believed in dreams. He believed in miracles. He believed that dreams do come true. What he actively conditioned himself to fear the most was fear itself. He would travel on our local roads in territories the ordinary mortal would consider dangerous in the dead of night. And if indeed he ran into an ambush, he escaped unscathed. He appeared to have the capacity to work fate to his own end.

His factories and companies opened up Offa in a way comparable only to how the National Railway Corporation did for the town. Such was the influence and the economic power he wielded that the major banks opened branches in Offa, because of his businesses. This cannot be overemphasised. Uncountable homes were economically empowered through the employment opportunities created. Naturally, this led to other businesses setting up shop. He retired from playing a frontal role in the running of his businesses, but his mental agility never diminished until he drew his last breath. He was thoroughly dedicated to what one might term 'the Offa Cause'. He desired, with all his being, that Offa would rise finally from the shadows of centres of power and influence in his state, not to supplant them as first in the pecking order, but rather that Offa would stand on its own. And he fought with all he had to achieve this ideal. He used his influence within powerful circles to have the central government show an interest in Offa

and help the cause to industrialise the community to make it economically viable.

It would not be out of place to describe him as the personification of the saying Ijakadi l'oro Offa. He had to fight the established order before his time to get the recognition he deserved. He inverted the power structure by demonstrating that an outsider (someone outside the ruling elite and religious classes) could exert enormous power.

The dominance of business activities in the life of Chief Adesoye inevitably tended to emphasise and project his transactional side far above his relational, thus obscuring his nature and gifts in this area that were just as uncommon.

He may have been considered ruthless when he needed to be, but in as many instances, he was most merciful. Often, people's perception of him depended on the side he projected. Any one fortunate to have been close to him or interacted with him saw a side he deemed appropriate. No one could firmly paint a complete picture of the man. He was pragmatic. He adopted a business-like approach in his dealings. He did not suffer fools. He was a controlled man, a managed personality who more often than not went against his own native impulse and inclination.

He had a gift of making everyone, regardless of who he or she was, comfortable around him. He made a conscious, deliberate effort to do this, as his reputation normally preceded him, causing many approaching or meeting him for the first time to be in great awe of him. He never forgot the humble background from where he had sprung; he came from nothing to something and was aware that fortune had smiled on him. He was witty. He always had a bag of rib-cracking jokes. He would ask questions ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, just to make a visitor loosen up. He never diminished the role providence played in enabling him to leave an indelible imprint. He believed in the efficacy of prayers. He believed in grace. He attributed his successes to the grace of God. Of course, hard work figured significantly, but grace allowed things to align. He embraced tradition. He rewarded meritorious work and gave people multiple opportunities to prove themselves. He mentored many entrepreneurs and raised many children outside of his biological ones.

The death of his wife, Comfort Aduke Adesoye cast a pall over his life and he became like a tree laden with plump, low hanging fruits, inevitably attracting a multitude of well-aimed stones. He was hurt, bruised by the onslaught, yet he withstood all with admirable equanimity and accepted his fate with dignity. He betrayed no sign of being broken until the very end.

APPENDIX

CHIEF EMMANUEL OLATUNJI ADESOYE (OON, CON)

FNIQS, FRICQS.,

THE ASIWAJU OF OFFA

FORMER NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF O.D.U

Born in Ebute Meta, Lagos state on the 25th April, 1938.

SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

African Church Bethel School Ebute-Meta, Lagos 1948 –
1951

St. Mark's School, Offa 1952

Offa Grammar School, Offa 1953 – 1957

Yaba Technical College, Yaba 1958

Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology, Enugu
1959

South East Essex College of Arts, Science and Technology
U.K 1961 – 1963

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:

Fellow of the Royal Institute of Chartered Quantity Surveyors (FRICS) London 1965 and became the first Northern Nigerian student to qualify as a Quantity Surveyor and the second Nigerian to do so.

Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (FNIQS) in 1965.

PROFESSIONAL WORK PLACEMENTS IN THE UK:

Assistant Quantity Surveyor and Quantity Surveyor in the following Organization in the UK 1963 -1966:

R. Cordon Fanshawe and Patners; Aldywch House London

Woolwich Borough Council; South-East London

Veale and Sanders; Hanover Square London

PUBLIC SERVICE:

Quantity Surveyor, Ministry of works, Northern Region, 1966 – 1968.

Head, Quantity Surveying Department 1968.

Represented the Northern Region of Nigerian at the world Bank.

Education Development projects programmed in the preparation of Procedure and Implementation Guides.

Served the Interim Common services Agency of Nigeria (ICSA) in Kaduna in various capacities as Chief Quantity Surveyor and Acting Chief Architect.

Member, Board of Governor Kaduna Polytechnic Kaduna 1979 – 1982.

Member, Board of Governor Kwara State Housing Coloration 1976 – 1979

Represented the Federal Government on Export Promotion in an extensive tour to West Africa sub Region in 1980.

Member, Federal Government of Nigerian Study Groupon

Maintenance of Public Utilities 1984.

Chairman, Expert Committee set up by the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industries on Nigerian Machine Tools, Oshogbo 1985.

Member, Kwara State Industrial Development 1985.

Chairman, Afribank Limited 1987 – 1989

Member, and Vice Chairman, Kwara State Government Think Tank on Industrialization since 1997.

PRIVATE BUSINESS AND BUSINESS VENTURES:

Founder and Principal of Adesoye and Partners, Adesoye Holdings, Okin Biscuits and Proprietor Adesoye College, Offa. Noble Breweries Limited

SOCIETAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

Chief Launcher and Benefactor at the First Kwara State Industrial Development Fund in 1984. **Helper** in the Industrialization of the Country by setting up of various Industrial Projects, resulting in the creation of thousands of direct job opportunities in the country.

AWARD OF SCHOLARSHIP:

Secondary Schools Level.

Tertiary Institutions most especially for Engineering and Law Students who solicit financial assistance.

COMMUNITY AND STATE SERVICE:

Asiwaju Adesoye Kwara Youths Empowerment Centre – where Millions of Naira have been given out.

Former National President of Offa Descendant Union, a Socio-Cultural Development Association of Offa Indigenes Home and abroad 1996.

TITLES AND AWARDS:

Maye of Offa – by His Royal Majesty, The Late Olofa of Offa, Oba Mustapha Olawoore Olanipekun (Ariwajoye II) 1979.

Asiwaju of Offa - by His Royal Majesty, The Late Olofa of Offa, Oba Mustapha Olawoore Olanipekun (Ariwajoye II) 2001.

Baba Isale of Odo Owa – by Olota Of Odo - Owa 1995.

Merit Award by the Kwara State Government for the

Industrial and Educational Development Contributions to the State in 1987.

Awarded National Honour of Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) in 2002.

Awarded National Honour of Commander of the Order of the Niger. The Federal Republic (OON) in 1999.

Awarded Fellow of The Federal Polytechnic, Offa (FFPO) in Business Administration in 1998.

Kwara State Association of Nigeria UK and Southern Ireland 2012

The Nigeria Institute of Quantity Surveyors – Life Time Achievement Award. February 16, 2013.

Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors Kwara State Chapter. 9th December, 2010.

Asiwaju of Offa by His Royal Majesty, the Late Olofa of Offa Oba Mustapha Olawoore Olanipekun (Ariwajoye II) On 28th April 2001.

