

ODDS

Blessing Peter Titus (Nigeria)



Uma was disturbed. He didn't know what the future held for him especially now that they were relocating to the village after his father's retirement. All his life, fifteen years and four months to be precise, he had lived with his family in the city of Jos. Not once within this period had he ever visited the village. Whenever his parents were visiting the village, they left him in the care of Auntie Margaret, his mother's elder sister who lived in the same estate with them.

He didn't mind staying with Auntie Margaret but as he grew older, he wondered why he was never taken to his village. All he knew was that he was from Benue State, Gboko Local Government area and Ihugh Village precisely. The only extended family he knew were those who came to visit and a few others who he had seen in pictures. When he asked his father why he was never taken to the village, especially after a lot of his classmates at school told wonderful stories about their Christmas experiences in the village, his father told him it was because he was protecting him from their village people who had killed his first wife and his other children. "My son, I was born to the family of Tervershima, during the time of yam harvest. At that time, birth certificates were not known and women gave birth at home with the help of older women. Births were remembered by the season when the child was born. My father was a very wealthy man. He had large farmlands and storage space

for his farm produce which included yams, maize, beniseed, melon and guinea corn. It was very common for a man to show the extent of his wealth by the number of wives and children he had. My father had six wives and over thirty children.

“My mother, Iveren was the last wife. She was his favourite. It was that same year when I was born that modern education began to take root in our locality. For years the white people tried to convince people to go to the schools but a lot of parents weren’t interested. They believed that going to school would make their children lazy and unwilling to work on their parents’ farms. My mother convinced my father to let me go to school. Although mother wanted me to start immediately, the school administrator refused to enrol me as they said I was too young. I had to wait for another year. I was finally enrolled and began class one. I was at the top of my class until I finished class seven and proceeded to the Teachers College in Kaduna. After completing my studies, I was employed to teach in a school in Jos.

“I met and married my first wife two years after that. When she was seven months pregnant, I took her to the village to stay with my mother. It was the custom then to take your wife to the village as she would be taken care of by her husband’s mother before and after giving birth. Our first child was a boy but he was constantly ill. We still visited the village to bond with our relatives. My wife became pregnant again and this time she gave birth to triplets. The children kept falling sick over the next few months. Within two years, two of the triplets died and only one survived. She was however, very sickly.

“On the tenth year of our marriage, she gave birth to twins who died few weeks afterwards. Two years later, she gave birth to twins again.

They too were sickly and after a short while, one died. We now had three children – Andrew, Agatha and Anita – who were sickly.

“That same year, we all went to the village for Christmas as usual. When we came back from the village, the children became so sick and they all died on the same day, three months later. My wife fell into depression and she also died a year later.

“I know it was the witches in our village who didn’t want my happiness and progress. They killed them all and I don’t want that to happen to you. It was three years after her death that I met and married your mother and thankfully, we have been blessed with you and your siblings.”

This story made Uma to fear going to the village. He believed that there were witches in the village and even though he later learnt about genotypes, he did not want to be associated with his village. He knew that it was probable that his half-siblings were sicklers and were unlikely to survive into adulthood. This however, did not assuage his fears about the village.

When they finally moved to the village in November, Uma was surprised to see that his village had good tarred roads, piped water, electricity and well-built duplexes. He was shocked by the fact that a very large percentage of the people could even speak English and were well educated. He had had a very dreary idea of how life in the village would be. He was impressed with the level of hospitality the people displayed. Every home offered plenty of food when they went visiting and it amazed him that most people left their homes unlocked yet, there were neither cases nor reports of stealing.

By December, he was already in love with the village. He finally understood why most of his classmates back then never missed going to the village for Christmas. There was so much to do and

enjoy: picnics at the stream, village dances and masquerade displays, endless chatter between different age groups and extended family members, visiting people and eating a wide range of delicacies especially his new found favourite; pounded yam, with adenge soup and bush meat.

Uma enjoyed his stay in the village immensely and wished that he would be staying there longer. However, he had to go to the university. He was barely done with registration and settling down in school when disaster struck. Nigeria reported its first case of Coronavirus. Things quickly deteriorated as the cases were continually rising and many people succumbed to the disease. The government had to take stringent measures and soon schools were closed and lockdowns imposed.

He had to go back to the village. He hoped that the lockdown would be lifted but January turned into February and February into March. Soon it was April, the rainy season. Like all farmers, Uma's family had to prepare their farms. Uma was excited as he would get to practise what he was studying at the university – agricultural engineering. He however, soon learnt that it was not easy as each family had to work on their own. Families were saving the little money they had and so could not afford to employ anyone. Also the government encouraged people to social distance and this affected the village life. Everyone stayed with their family members. The months rolled by and it seemed that Coronavirus was getting worse. Meanwhile Uma was so tired of working in the farm as it was too tiring. This inspired him to think of ways to make farming efficient especially for the small-scale farmers.

They had been out of school for a whole year. Schools started teaching online to cover the needed curriculum before the academic

year was completed. They had many assignments, seminars and even examination was done online.

One year later, the pandemic ended and students resumed physical learning. Uma was excited as he hoped to work on his ideas. He shared his ideas with his friends who laughed at him. He shared the ideas with his lecturer who also laughed at him. They cited lack of funds and inexperience as factors that would make him not to achieve his dreams. Uma was so discouraged that he shelved his ideas.

On his final year, Uma had to do a project before graduating. His supervisor was Professor Kyari. The professor rejected his proposals one after the other citing them as irrelevant to the society today. After more than ten trials, Uma was so discouraged that he almost gave up and went back to the village.

One day as he was contemplating his next step, Professor Kyari called him to his office. He told his professor about his experience during the pandemic period and some of the ideas he came up with. Professor Kyari was so excited and he agreed to guide Uma in working on the project. They worked day and night as they had a limited time. Uma did not even realise it as at last one person believed in his dream.

Finally, it was time for all the final year students to present their projects. Uma's project was a machine called the double M2. Its function was to harvest maize, peel the back and remove the kernels from the cob. The most impressive thing about it was that it was solar powered and very handy. Everyone was impressed by this and Uma got a grant from the government to start up his own business of producing the double M2 in commercial quantities, as well as develop his other ideas of the planter, weeder and tractor which were also to be solar powered whilst creating job opportunities for people within the community. Uma became a celebrity overnight as his invention helped to ease the burden on many small-scale farmers.