

## Things Have Changed

“So that is why Mr Tortoise goes about with a rough shell. Tomorrow’s story will be about the royal tears,” said Nna-nna (Grandfather), as he ended the day’s story.

We sat around him under the mango tree.

Every evening Nna-nna would gather together all his grandchildren.

“Come, my sons and daughters,” he would say, “let me bless you with ancient wisdom embedded in the stories of our ancestors.”

All seven his grandchildren would then gather under the mango tree in front of Nna-nna’s Obi (chieftaincy house). Each of us would come with a small wooden chair called Nwanyinodulokwu, while Nna-nna would sit in his chieftaincy chair. The rays of moonlight made the atmosphere friendly. Such evenings were generally silent, except for the occasional shrill chirping of crickets from Nne-nna’s (Grandmother’s) nearby cassava farm.

Sometimes we would look to the moon and see a figure like a man breaking firewood with an axe. “What is that inside the moon?” we would ask.

Nna-nna would tell us that it was the angels preparing to cook.

He liked talking in parables. He would say that parable is the language of wisdom, and a child who learns how to speak in parables is already washing his hands so that he can eat with the elders one day. Each time Nna-nna used a parable, he would explain the meaning in plain language.

I loved memorizing parables. I wanted to have lots of them in my quiver, so that when I grow old, I will be able to teach my children and grandchildren this wisdom in parables. Nna-nna’s storytelling usually began at twilight and would continue till nine o’clock.

I lived with my father, mother and little sister in the family’s compound. It was a very big one. My two uncles, Aku and Edu, lived in the same compound with their wives and children. Aku had four children, while Edu had two. Nna-nna lived with Nne-nna in his Obi, which was at the centre of the compound. We were one big family.

Nna-nna always encouraged us to live in unity. “It is very easy to break a single stick in the broom, but when they are in the bunch, they become impossible to break. Such is the power of unity.”

That was about ten years ago.

“Miraculously”, things have changed. “Civilization” was a chief among Oyibo (White) man’s many charms. Cunningly, we were taught that we were primitive, so we paid them to refine us, and we are still paying. The cost is immeasurable. Now, we live in the City, and the busy life of modernization precludes that communal leisure. We rarely see our parents’ faces; sitting, never mind sitting together at the table of ancient storytelling. Television has taken the place of Ijele, that king of all masquerades which danced majestically to Igba-eze (royal band). We know more about Americans than we know about our own Igbo people. Even at school, all the things we are taught stretch our imagination into a strange land. I have never met Prince Charles and Princess Diana, but I assure you that I can write their biographies. We should therefore not be too amazed at our craving for a longer ponytail hairstyle and a lighter skin. But what will be left of the wisdom of our forefathers a hundred years from now?

- Kenechukwu Ikebuaku