

# UZUAKOLI: MY REMINISCENCES

The year 1973 was ushered in with the seasonal Uguru wind (Harmattan) that blows in January and most students looked forward to resumption after the yuletide festivities. It was a year of many changes in the College. The Government introduced the new school calendar from September to June, while all the classes were shortened by six months ie. January to June to make way for the new school calendar beginning in September.

The Higher School Section of the College was to be phased out that same year under Ukpabi Asika's externally teleguided action to destroy education in Igboland. The previous year, a Higher School student made the College proud by winning the USA sponsored JF Kennedy International/ National essay competition towering above all other colleges. Now it was to go -- the jewel in the Crown!! Ooh! how are the mighty fallen!!!

Interestingly on the converse, it was a glorious year of the College' Golden Jubilee Anniversary: 50 years of its founding (1923 -1973) by the Methodist Missionaries and we all looked forward to wonderful celebrations.

As part of the changes, the school appointed class 4 students as Compound Officers/ Monitors (?) who were Prefects in- training to take over from the last batch of Higher School Prefects. I was so appointed but was denied confirmation by Rev. Rogers Uwadi, the Chaplain who conducted the confirmation interview in the Chapel one Saturday evening (another story).

Environmentally, the Biafran RAP Salt Pond beside the Castle was backfilled to add to the ecstasies of the College and remove avoidable accidents by drowning in preparation for the Golden Jubilee celebrations and closed the breeding ground for

army of mosquitoes and the disturbing nightly crow of frogs to the relief of the students especially those in Hardy House.

Equally important was the transfer of Mr. O. Onokala as the Principal and his replacement by Mr. A. Anyaoha, though not an Old Boy but was a distinguished self-taught man.

As the year began and in Class 4, we were qualified to use the Senior science laboratories. With the commencement of classes, we were taught by Mr. SN Onyeukwu, the Senior Physics Master "whose magnets we were told by generation of seniors make Chakam". He was also my House Master for Hardy House and he knew me well. After some two or three lessons, and did not see me in any of the classes, he inquired if I was to be in that class and the answer was in the affirmative. He immediately sent for me and on reporting, inquired why I was absent from class. I had no answer. He there and then made me the Physics class monitor with the threat that on failure, he will take me to the Principal for disciplinary action. I immediately froze and humbled as well.

My duty was at every Physics class, I will go to the Laboratory Technician -- Mr. Amalu, collect the Laboratory keys, open the door before the arrival of the Teacher and at the end of the class, put back all the instruments/ apparatus used, making sure there was no pilfering, lock the door and submit the key before rushing to be in the next class. Thus, I was the first to go to the Laboratory and the last to leave after each lesson and practicals.

The weight of the new responsibility was enormous for me to bear. On getting to the dormitory, I wept uncontrollably and sank into deep melancholy. Many friends gathered around to console me. The puff in my head as Funkys disappeared and life of seriousness with my studies began.

I kept faith and soldiered on. At the end of the Session, I thought it was all over, but he instructed that I should continue. I swallowed my saliva hard and courageously

carried on to the end of graduation. This was a measured discipline by a father without welding the big stick.

When we were preparing for the WASC examination, he invited me to the office, inquired how I was preparing for the examinations, offered words of advice and encouragement with the assurance that I will come out in flying colours.

At the end, I made very good result/ grade in WASC, won two Golden Jubilee Prizes instituted by the Old Boys during the Anniversary and a Federal Government Scholarship to study Petroleum Engineering.

While working as a Bank Clerk, I took the scholarship documents for endorsement to the College, there I met my Mentor again. He rejoiced with me and literally lifted me up at the success I recorded. We discussed my work and he counselled that I get into the University without waste of time.

When I reflect on the treatment, it was a measured discipline imposed by a father without bruising my small ego. The sense of responsibility engendered was immeasurable and it changed my attitude to studies and work for good; and I applied same measure while exercising authority in the Higher Service.

When I compare it with the draconian treatment meted out to two of my classmates, the psychological damage induced on them at such impressionable young ages, the disastrous effect on their WASC performance and their aversion to anything Methodist College, I bless the Lord that I had a father and mentor in Mr. SN Onyeukwu (Physics).

On Social Responsibility to the College, I served as the President of the Old Boys Association (Student Section) for three years while at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, a founding member and official of the Abuja chapter and above all, as the then Deputy Director, Hydropower Development in the Department of Dams and

Reservoir Operations of the Federal Ministry of Water Resources sited the Uzuakoli earth dam on Ilo stream with mini hydropower component to serve the College and the Uzuakoli community under the Debt Relief Gain (DRG) programme of Government as a give back and in recognition of the formative role in my life by the College.

May the College endure!

Happy Centenary celebrations (1923 - 2023)!!

Samuel Onyebuchi Ome, DIC, DOB

1974 Class & Hardy House Room 4