

OBIORA

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**“DON'T
TELL ME
ABOUT THE
STORM,
DELIVER
THE
CARGO”**

THE STORY OF MY LIFE...

...Dr. Obiora Okonkwo's riveting narrative of his journey so far



DON'T TELL ME
ABOUT THE STORM,
DELIVER THE
CARGO

Dr. Okonkwo in Managing Business
In Nigeria: Challenges And Prospects;
a Maiden Convocation Address to Executive MBA
Graduands of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Business
School, Awka, May 10, 2019.

*"I hire people not to give me excuses on
why certain things cannot, and should
not be done, but to break through the
hurdles and deliver return on investment.*

*That is why my motto in
business is: DON'T TELL ME
ABOUT THE STORM.
DELIVER THE CARGO."*

41 ON BEING A

Culture Enthusiast and Coming from the same Ogidji Community as literary icon Chinua Achebe

Unless you do a DNA test to prove otherwise, I sometimes claim...

24 QUOTES

...Don't tell me about the storm, deliver the cargo.

27 ACADEMIC

Pursuits in Russia

My first and second degrees were in Economics at the Peoples Friendship University in Moscow

29 WHAT DRIVES

My Investment Choices

What actually determines my investment interest is not purely commercial...

30 MY JOURNEY

into Politics

In serious societies, politics is for decent people because if you are not decent and venture into politics...

33 WHY I ESTABLISHED

Pro-Value Humanity Foundation

...my mind told me that all we need to be and all that we require to be what we want to be...

37 ON PHILANTHROPIC

Works, Igbo Culture and Religion

I believe that all I am is God's. All I want is to belong to him and everything I have belongs to him

47 ULTIMATE

Goal

To engage in and do everything humanly possible for the common good and to please God

CONTENTS

06 THE STORY OF

Dr. Obiora Okonkwo

My early years has to do with the story I was told. The story has it that I was born in the present day Gombe state...

08 MY EARLY

School Days

I started off relatively early and was done with secondary school at age 16 and half...

35 MY ROLE

Models

I have been mainly guided by biblical principles. Those are what have guided me mostly...

09 MY SECONDARY

School Years and Combining School with Trading

I attended Boys High School Onitsha. It was a new school then. I was among the third set at the school...

12 MY FATHER

and I

My parents had a balanced influence on me. I say so because for the entire period...

44 MY HOBBIES

Something that I like doing, that provides me with everything in one package...

16 MY MOTHER

and I

The other aspect of my life is my faith in God which my mother is primarily responsible for...

45 ON MUSIC

Preferences

I listen to praise and worship genre especially, the Igbo

18 GOING ABROAD

For Studies

Honestly speaking, I did not plan to go to Russia. It was not my first choice...

46 BIGGEST

Turn Offs

Deceit! It repulses me. Nothing else repulses me more

22 MY MOTHER'S

two key Requests as I Left for Russia

My mum obviously felt good for the opportunity. I had to go abroad for higher education...

26 ADJUSTING

to Life in Russia

That was one of the most surprising things in my life. On leaving Nigeria, I spoke only English...

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A portrait of a man wearing a white traditional Nigerian shirt (Agbada) with a red velvet hat (Fila) adorned with gold and red embroidery. He is wearing black-rimmed glasses and has a red pocket square in his shirt. The background is a solid dark grey.

**The
People's
Wish**

The Story of

Dr. Obiora Okonkwo





My Ye

My early years has to do with the story I was told. The story has it that I was born in the present day Gombe state. My parents were living there then. That was in December 1965. At that point, there was already growing tension in the north building up to the civil war. But the other interesting thing about my birth was how my name, Obiora, came about.

My mother always told me that she would want to live long to see what I would become. She told me that I was born in the twelfth month of her pregnancy and for her; that gave rise to the name Obiora -*the people's wish*. She told me that the pregnancy delayed such that everyone wished I came out fine. And thank God, I did. However, at the time, a lot of people were already moving back to the eastern part of Nigeria because of the tension and anxiety of the looming civil war

EARLY years

“
*...she personally named me
Obiora - the peoples' wish;
reflecting the concern of many
due to the circumstances
surrounding my birth.*
”

Like everyone in the family, my maternal grandmother was very anxious. She was looking forward to the ninth month and the baby's delivery so she would come over to take care of her daughter (my mother) and the baby as is traditional (Omugo). By the eight month she was ready and had made plans for the trip to Gombe. She waited through the ninth month and tenth month and there was no message. The main means of communication then were cable, the postal service or people returning home by train. By the twelfth month, my grandmother got the news that a baby boy had been born. She was in dilemma not knowing whether to travel up north while others were coming back home. But there was pressure on her, by all around her in the village to travel. She was asked to go so as to be sure that my mother was doing fine with the new baby. She

agreed and eventually travelled to Gombe for the omugo. When she arrived, she personally named me Obiora—the peoples' wish; reflecting the concern of many due to the circumstances surrounding my birth.

Shortly after, I was taken back to the east as an infant, just few months old. I recall my mother telling me that in the course of escaping from Gombe, we spent some nights in the bush without food. But we managed to get back to our hometown Ogidi, where like everyone else who was dislocated, started life over again. Thank God we survived the civil war and all the sufferings associated with it.

It was in my hometown that I began my early childhood activities, including my first formal education Nta-Akara, which is equivalent to, but not quite like the Nursery school of

today- as we had our classes under trees. From there, I proceeded to primary school, reaching Primary 4, in my hometown before moving to Onitsha, about 12 kilometers away, where my father was living and trading. In Onitsha, I lived with my father and older sister who was about entering secondary school at the time. I am the fifth in a family of nine children. I continued my Primary education in Onitsha at Crowther Memorial Primary School. This meant from Monday through Friday I was in Onitsha, but at the weekends, we returned to the village to stay with the larger family.

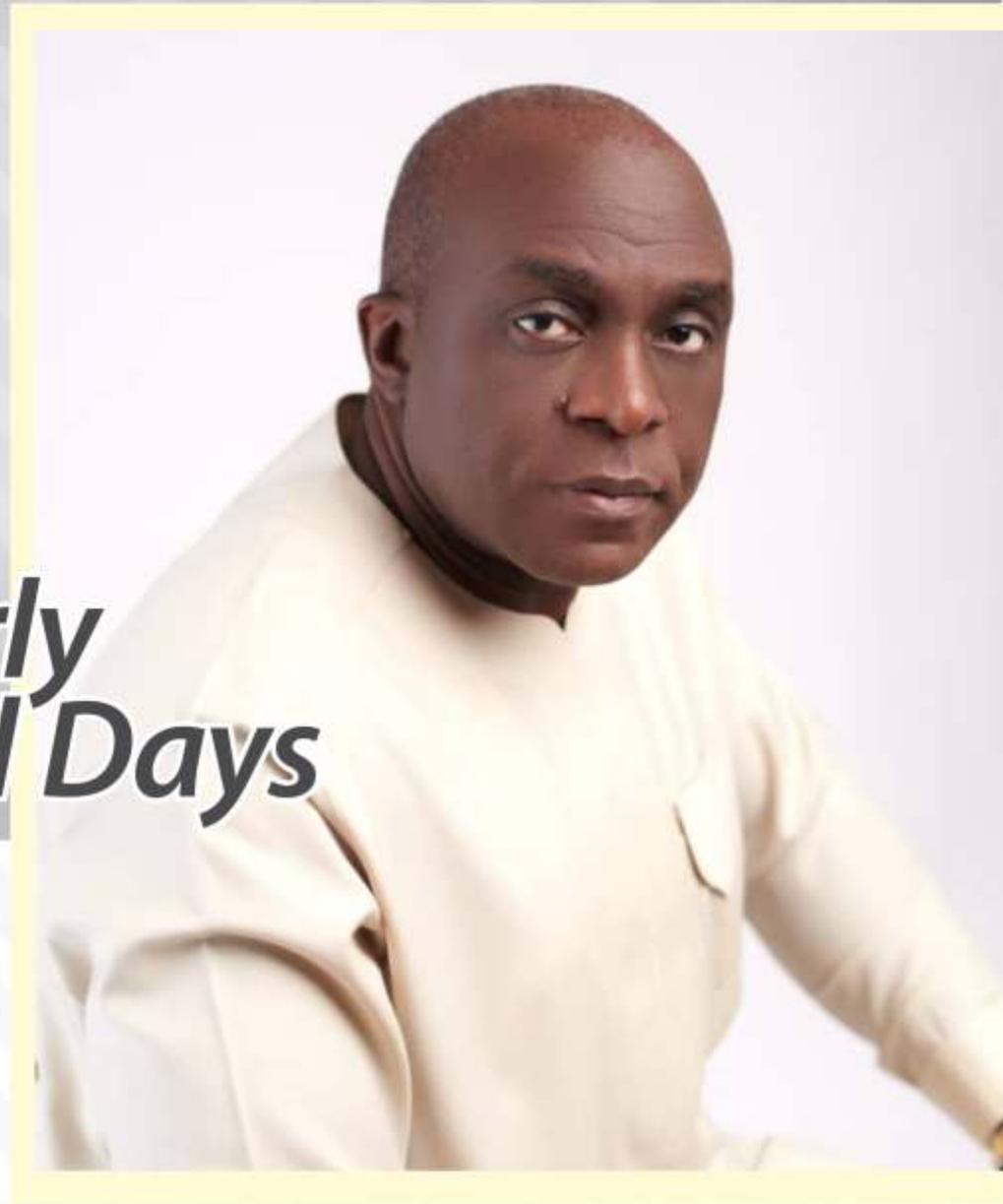
So, growing up for me was basically what happened between my village and Onitsha. I had a normal childhood like any other child at the time, but going to Onitsha was a privilege. It exposed me to life in the city.

My Early School Days

I started off relatively early and was done with secondary school at age 16 and half. However, one thing I know was that having been born at 12 months, my mother would always tell me that I was very old at birth. I left secondary school at 16 and half, but I looked older. I remember in my literature class in Class Three, we came across the word wrinkles. The teacher tried to explain the meaning of the word. But before the students could pull out their dictionaries to search for the meaning, our teacher pointed at me and told the class to look at the line on my forehead and said that's what wrinkles mean. So, the wrinkle you see on my forehead has been with me from my younger days. It was even then that I became conscious of the wrinkle. However, beside those little things, I must confess that the life

of responsibility I now know came from that time. I thank my parents. Somehow, we became the reference point. We were doing well in school and not known for bad behaviour. It was all good. We were not a family with negative issues. A combination of my father and my mother's actions kept us grounded. They lived for nothing else but the good of their children. I believe that my father is a saint. He never compromised a lie. He abhorred it and I took that from him. I detest lies. He had no

room for gossip. He kept secrets and would not allow you gossip to him about someone else. He would rather that you said whatever before the person. He disliked those who maltreated others as much as he detests lies. In the later years of his life, he became more Christian than any other person I know. He believed that one should be practical about life and avoid injustice. He would go to any extent to fight injustice. He lived his life for the good of others.





Going to Secondary School and Trading

I attended Boys High School Oriitsha. It was a new school then. I was among the third set at the school. We had a young teacher, lyke Ilozumba. He is an engineer now. He was a young guy then. He was teaching us commerce and we used to hang out with him. I blended very well with commerce because of my practical experience from the market. The thing about it was this. My father had stroke at the age of 50. I was very close to him and slept on same bed with him. He woke one morning and could not raise his hands. We did not know what it was then. So, we rushed him to the hospital. It was stroke. He had some signs. He was very organized and had a family doctor. He was having headaches etc. the doctor saw these. And he knew my dad to be a very active man. He never let anything weigh him down. So, instead of the doctor to keep him in bed to rest and calm him down, he let him go. He thought that keeping him in bed would make him worry a lot. So, he let him go home and that was it. So, when he took ill, the responsibility to manage his business fell on me. My elder brother was at the time in the university. My father had apprentices and I had to manage them. He was dealing in consumer provision goods in wholesale. He rose to become a sub-distributor to major consumer goods producers. So, I would wake

at 5am, to go to Ochanja Wholesale Market, purchase the stock and make arrangements for distributions then, come back and prepare for school. I would go back to the shop after school. I enjoyed doing that. I had no dull moment because my father had prepared me for that. I was managing the apprentices and also going to school. It was so cool for me that I had a lot of money to spend. Sometimes I paid school fees for my friends who couldn't afford them at that tender age. I was living alone in the city of Onitsha as my father had moved back to the village because of his illness. I was independent at the age of 14. My sister had married and I had the home all by myself. I was enjoying it so much that I did not want to go to the university after my school certificate examination. All I wanted was to be a trader. It was such that when others were reading to pass JAMB exams, I would be working to fail so that there won't be any reason to take me off the market. It became an issue in my family. My senior brother was unhappy with that. He was very troubled about it. He wanted me to go to university. Before then, I was doing well in school, but when the university entrance exam results were released, I did not do well. My brother was so upset with the outcome that he came and closed down the shop. He chased me from Onitsha back to the village and said I must do something about furthering my

education.



That was the beginning of my journey to Lagos. I always wanted to be a trader and be in Onitsha. Onitsha was where all the big business people were then. Everyone was in Onitsha. Not even Lagos. Some have branches in Lagos. At that age I was already living big, wearing Italian suits and shoes and mingling with the big business people in Onitsha. I wanted to be nowhere else but Onitsha. But my brother shut down the business and even closed the house in Onitsha and



asked me to get back home to the village until I fulfilled his conditions. He had his way and I am grateful to him for his insistence because it made me what I am today.

Shutting down the shop didn't quite have an adverse economic impact on the family. At that point my brother was already a graduate. He graduated as a civil engineer and back then, things were good. Added to that, two of my sisters were already married. So, the support system wasn't a problem.

My father remained in the village and battled the illness. He never wanted it to weigh him down. He was a very strong man. He took ill at 50 and died at 74. Within this time frame, he had five stroke attacks and managed through them all. He did not give up easily. By the time he died, we had all grown up and my mother did nothing else than take care of him.



My parents had a balanced influence on me. I say so because for the entire period, my mother was a full time housewife taking care of us. We did not go to live with any relations and had no nannies. My mum was fully dedicated to that task. She had her own level of influence on me just like my dad.

My father did not believe that anyone should spend time doing nothing. He was a strict disciplinarian. Even to play was for him a risky thing to do. He must engage you from morning to night. Even at night, if he finds you not sleeping when you are supposed to, it means you have time to spend and he will engage you with something. So, we had no time to play around. Coming to live with him in Onitsha was tasking. At the close of school, in Primary 4, instead of him to allow me to do what other kids of my age were doing, he would send me to a friend of his who was a tailor. He made me learn some little tailoring skills like sewing in the buttons or tacking the button holes until he closed from his business at the Main Market then he would pick me on his way back home. When I got into Primary 6, he saw me as capable of doing much more than basic tailoring so he made me come to the Main Market at the close of school each day to trade with him. With him, there was no play time. My dad was notorious for this that even other kids dreaded him. If they were playing and suddenly sighted him, everyone would run away and hide. He was that strict. And if at any point in time I found myself playing football with other kids, someone must mount sentry to watch out for him and alert me when he was coming and we would all disperse. If I played football in school and got injured, it was in my interest not to complain about it to him. I rather hid it and endured the pain and pretend that all was fine. He believed that if you gave kids little time, they would use it to engage in negative things. He was so strict a disciplinarian and now, in retrospect, I see that was his own way of inculcating positive values in us and making sure we did not go astray. He was a very hard-working man.

I remember a particular incident in my primary school that changed my life forever. That should

be in my Primary Two in the village. I had an Igbo language homework to do. My dad wanted to see me through the homework. It was about 7pm and outside was pitch dark. There was no electricity in my village then. We used lanterns. People rarely went out at night. So, we had the lesson and I needed to start writing. I pulled out my exercise book. I needed a ruler to draw a line. When I pulled it out, my dad sighted another person's name on it. He asked where my own ruler was. I told him that I must have given it to someone else and that I borrowed from my friend, and that I would give it back the next day. That incident left me with a memory. It was a problem in the house that night. My dad wouldn't have that. He concluded at that time that I stole the ruler and that he would rather kill me that night than bring up a child who is a thief. My mother intervened. My senior sister, who was like an assistant mother to all of us, also intervened. But my dad would not be pacified. He however gave a condition, after long pleading- that I must return the ruler that night to the same spot I borrowed it from or I would not sleep in his house. This was sometime after 8pm; it was really dark and no one would want to go out at that time. But he insisted that I must return the ruler. My school was about 150 meters away from our house and so my mother and my elder sister took me. They brought the lantern and escorted me through the dark night to the school and I dropped the ruler there and we came back. It was a very frightful journey. I had to do it because that was the only condition for me to sleep in the house that night. From that, I learnt my lesson in fulfillment and self-contentment. That was my dad for you.

That was not to say that my dad was stupendously rich. He was only insisting that we must be content with what we have and use only what we were provided with. If borrowing was not an option, stealing was definitely out of it.

My Father and I

That way, I learnt contentment and living with a sense of satisfaction with whatever life brings my way. I can tell you with a sense of modesty, that though we lived in the city, we did not live with a whole lot of luxury, but we did not lack any essential things either. What was important then, was that we had our three-square meals regularly and clothing for Christmas and Easter. Having those meant that you were ok at the time. Additionally, for us, we had extra clothing for the traditional festival of our community, Nwafor Ogidi.

Food was something my dad never toyed with. There was always enough. My dad said he suffered so much food deprivation as a child that he swore nobody around him would suffer same way. He lost his parents at a very early age in life. His elder brother was unable to send him to school so he stopped at primary three. Though he was always first in his class, he went into apprenticeship. He grew up suffering. He lacked a lot and he swore to himself that no one around him would suffer same.

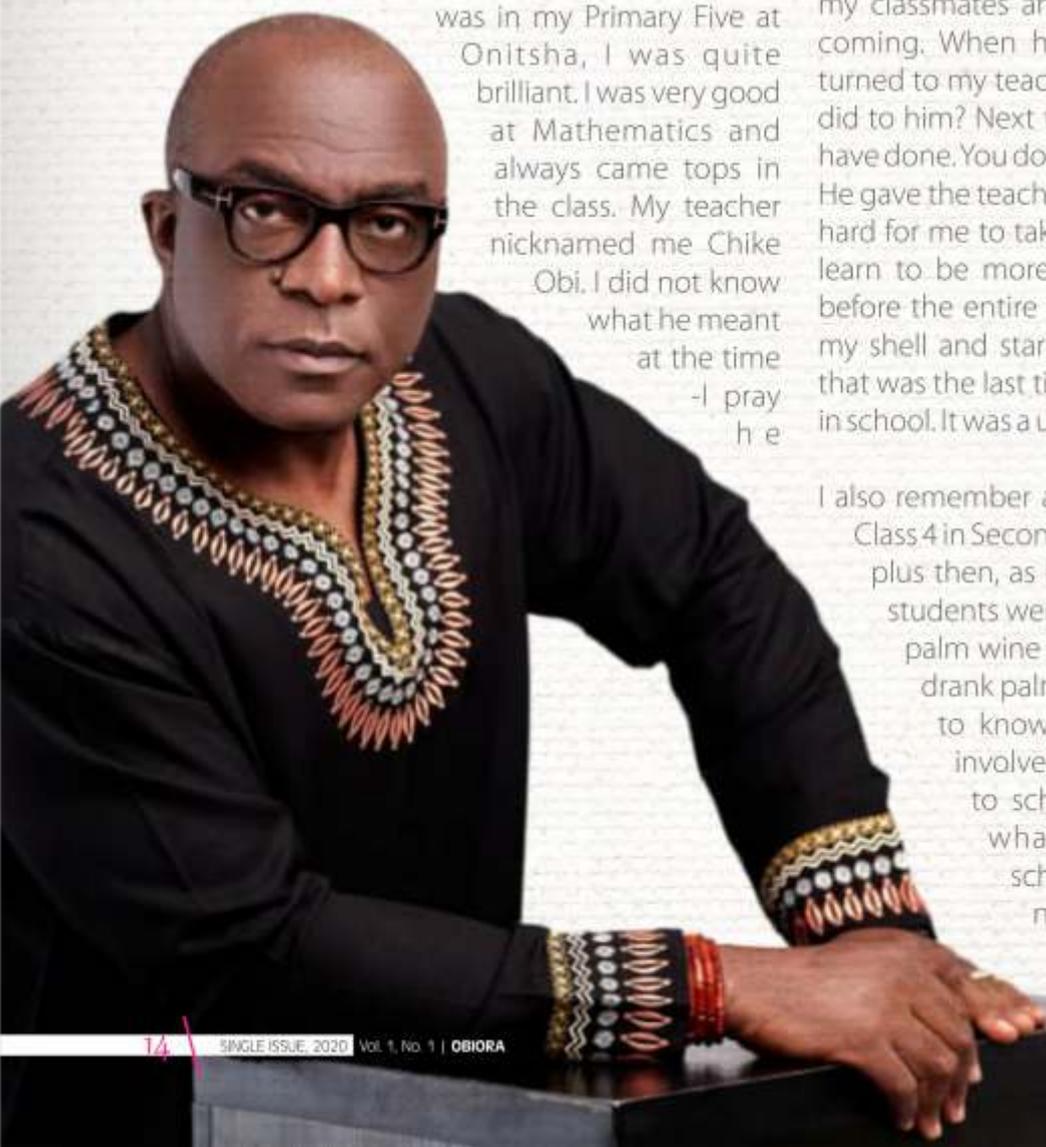
Another indelible experience was in my Primary Five at Onitsha, I was quite brilliant. I was very good at Mathematics and always came tops in the class. My teacher nicknamed me Chike Obi. I did not know what he meant at the time - I pray he

is still alive.

Sometimes I corrected him during mathematics class and for that reason I was a star; just for being good at mathematics. On this particular day, I was about eight years old and something happened; kids being kids.

There was an issue of restrictions but some kids continued doing their thing. So, the teacher sent us home and asked that we must come back to school with our parents. I got home and told my dad. He was calm, or so he appeared. He did not ask too many questions. From his reaction, I was excited and looked forward to going to school with him. In my mind, my dad would deal with the teacher and so, I was happy. The night was too long because I couldn't wait. The next day, he accompanied me to school. We went to my class and I pointed to the teacher and said 'that's the teacher'. He looked at me and the teacher. Then he did something that surprised me. Instead of upbraiding the teacher like I expected, he put his hand behind his shirt and pulled out a cane. He gave me the flogging of my life that day in front of my classmates and my teacher. I did not see it coming. When he was done flogging me, he turned to my teacher and said "did you see what I did to him? Next time, do to him 10 times what I have done. You don't have to call me to come over". He gave the teacher permission to do more. It was hard for me to take. But it taught me a lesson- to learn to be more respectful. He humiliated me before the entire class. Afterwards, I withdrew to my shell and started minding my business. And that was the last time I got engaged in any pranks in school. It was a useful life lesson for me.

I also remember another incident when I was in Class 4 in Secondary school. I was about 14 years plus then, as I recall the incident, a bunch of students went to the school buka to eat and palm wine was sold there. After eating, we drank palm wine. The school principal got to know about it and asked all those involved to come to bring their parents to school. Of course, I remembered what happened in my primary school days and decided there was no way my dad was going to know about it. I had to go far away to where





days and decided there was no way my dad was going to know about it. I had to go far away to where my elder sister was teaching in a primary school to beg her to come and represent my parents. She came and gave all the excuses she could on why our parents couldn't make it. After that, I never got involved in any issues again.

“ Those situations helped **SHAPE ME** and contributed in **MAKING ME** who I am today. They made me learn how and why I need not keep bad company. ”



My Mother and I

The *other aspect of my life*
is my faith in God
which my mother is *primarily*
responsible for.



My dad was a disciplinarian and a moralist. That was him, but that's one aspect of my life. The other aspect of my life is my faith in God which my mother is primarily responsible for. For her, it was total devotion to and absolute belief in God. That was 100 percent my mother. Her only friend was the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her next bosom friend was Jesus Christ. I grew up knowing her to be a devout Catholic and a staunch member of St Anthony of Padua Society. She never missed mass and was totally devoted to God. It was such that my immediate junior brother became a priest. He was 25 years in the priesthood in July, 2019. That was my mother. She was a woman of faith and total commitment to God. So, all of us grew up knowing the life of discipline and the life of faith. For me, it is the greatest inheritance any one could get. They

are things that formed me and made me. My mother was very desirous of having a disciplined well brought up kids. My parents were afraid to be seen as failing in the discipline of their children. She would not oppose my father in his disciplinary actions. My mother would rather join my father to flog you and afterwards, asked what the problem was. I recall someday, I was on the way back home with my dad, and having a father and son chat along the way. We saw a small boy being flogged for stealing from a shop. People gathered around there. My father turned around and started flogging me. His reason was that it was a warning never to behave like the boy. That was my father and me. I miss him and he remains my hero and number one role model.

“I miss him and he remains my hero and number one role model”



Going Abroad For Studies

Honestly speaking, I did not plan to go to Russia. It was not my first choice. I knew nothing about the country at the time. My only knowledge of the country then was seeing them during the soccer World Cup tournament with their jerseys having that inscription CCCP. Nothing else! However, it happened that an uncle of mine who studied in Russia was at the time, the President of the Association of East European-trained Graduates. Then, it was called Soviet Union and the association had scholarship slots from Russia. Russia wanted the best brains from Africa. So, this uncle of mine came back to the village and announced that the association was accepting applications and interviewing Nigerians for scholarships. But before then, I had moved over to Lagos and was living with my sister and her family at 1004 Flats in Victoria Island. Then 1004 flats was a choice estate. It was the best place to live. I liked

it. It had 24 hours supply of electricity. She had a family friend, Chief Vincent Nwankwo. He was one of the richest men then. He lived in Onitsha but had a branch office in Victoria Island, Lagos. All the big Igbo businessmen, at that time, lived in Onitsha. Some maintained branch offices in Lagos. I think this was in 1985 when the Structural Adjustment Programme was introduced and the import license regime was abolished by the government. I had finished from the School of Arts and Science in Victoria Island, Lagos. That was when I came across Chief Nwankwo, a big-time importer, an industrialist, who had investments in steel and other sectors. He was big. He was moving his Lagos office from Sanusi Fafunwa Street to Eko Court Complex on Kofo Abayomi Street. He could not figure out how to go about the new forex regime. So, he chose to move his office into a smaller apartment at Eko Court while trying to figure out what next to do. My sister spoke to him about him engaging me in any way, probably as an office manager. He asked me to meet him at the office the next day. I went over and found that nothing had been arranged in the office because he just moved. He asked me to clean up and arrange the office and wait till he returns in two weeks. I was happy to have the opportunity. My salary was very minimal, but something happened. In the process of arranging the office and keeping up the files, I was able to read up the issue on SFEM (Second Tier Foreign Exchange Market) and the new import license regime. I studied the details and understood what it meant. By doing so, I figured out how to get through it. During this time, I also looked into his files and saw all his companies and the different things he was involved and how my new knowledge of the new forex regime could help his business.

When he returned, I engaged him. I told him all I understood about the new forex regime and also discussed how he could get through them. I did not only tell him what I observed, I shared with him my thoughts on how I could help sort things out for him. He gave me a chance to do the things that I

proposed. So, I began the process and documented his company to participate in SFEM and stepped up the process to FEM. Having worked with him, he saw what I could do and he did not employ any person ahead of me. I became the manager of the Lagos office. He allowed me to

implement things and I developed a system of activating the accounts he had in the different banks for participation in SFEM. I used the accounts to source forex for him which enabled him to continue business. Business then was with Japan and Taiwan. He was on the verge of completing a steel plant in Onitsha (Vincent Standard Steel Industries Ltd), but the forex regime was frustrating him. He almost gave up until I stepped in

and fashioned out a way out and that way, we were able to get forex and he started again. The success of the strategy made it possible for him to resume

“...boss had so much trust in me that I became signatory to the company's accounts and could sign off, and allocate, any amount needed to different banks for the purchase of forex...”





importation of general goods. I coordinated his imports and ensured clearance from the ports and then, moved them to Onitsha. I was so good with the process that some of his friends started coming to me to help sort their foreign exchange issues. My boss had so much trust in me that I became signatory to the company's accounts and could sign off, and allocate, any amount needed to different banks for the purchase of forex to process Form M for imports. That was the level of trust.

In the course of my interaction with the banks, I was interfacing with the highest management of the banks. At some point, I realized that I needed higher education to fill in the gaps. So, the desire to go for higher education kicked off in me. I then applied for the Russian scholarship and got it. I wrote the competitive exams and scaled through. But again, that created confusion in me. I did not know if going to Russia would be better than going to America. I knew nothing of Russia and also knew there would be a language barrier. That indecision delayed my taking advantage of the scholarship for one year as I deferred the offer. At the end, I made up my mind to go to Russia first. I was clear in my

mind that I wasn't going to like Russia. Nevertheless, I said it would be better to go see Russia first, and then, proceed to the United States. I remember entering Russia with \$10,000 then, out of my personal savings. That was because my mind was set for the US. But getting to Russia, with my knowledge of the business sector, managing my father's business in Onitsha and exposure from managing Chief Nwankwo's business in Lagos, I saw some opportunities and knew that I could make it there. During the orientation period of one year, I discovered that it is a place I could live and prosper in. Foreign students were living large. It was a communist state then, and because of that, their rating for dollar against their own currency, the Ruble, was very low. It was a situation where for instance, if you wanted to buy a first-class ticket to fly from Russia to Japan, it could be 50 Rubles. That is equivalent to \$2,000. That's what you ought to pay if you were not a Russian. So, a typical student was earning a monthly scholarship stipend of 90 Rubles. That meant we were getting money much more than professors even. So, with 90 Rubles, you could get a lot of things done. Added to the money I came with, I had a lot of money.

And with that, I saw an opportunity. I started buying things there and sending back to Nigeria to sell; same as other students who have stayed there longer were doing. So, within three months of travelling to Russia, I was back to Nigeria on a business trip. I lived in Moscow where my university -Russian Friendship University was. We could fly in and out of Nigeria because we were now making money bringing items from Russia to sell in Nigeria.

The tradition was for first year students to act like

“

*It was life of trading,
going to school,
making money and
living good.*

”

errand boys to the senior students. That means,



they scouted the shops to find what was profitable to buy in commercial quantity. Once they found the shops, the big boys were approached to fund the purchase. That way, they also got some commission as reward. And when some of them travelled to Western countries, they could buy computers which they will give to junior students to sell in Russia. The profit from such sales could keep you afloat for the year. But when I came in with such amount of money, which was considered much in the Russian society then, the dynamics changed. Now, I could give loans to my fellow first year students to buy and sell to senior students. They were working for me too. They also bought products for me that I sold in Nigeria. They made their money and returned my loan. I also made more money bringing some of those goods to sell in Nigeria. Sometimes, we went to western countries to buy items like jeans; electronics etc., even something like chewing gum was a big deal in Russia then. The monthly stipend of 90 Rubles was huge. A typical student could survive on it for the entire semester and still have something left. That was how things started changing for me. It was life of trading, going to school, making money and living good.

Remember, this was about the late 1980s and early 1990s; the period of Perestroika and Glasnost. That was when Russia began to open up to the world. We were the initial set of people that started proper business in Russia. We started importing things into Russia. We left the small business of selling little items like jewelries that were made in Russia and went bigger. I incorporated a company in Moscow in 1991 with office and staff. I got involved in importing cocoa beans to Russia from European markets. That was my main product line and it was big business then. Before then, the Soviet Union had a central system of supply; the country will import and distribute to the factories which had no direct contact with the outside world where these raw materials were sourced from. So, when the communist system ended, there was scramble for suppliers. Russian factories were looking for links to the outside world. So, we were the first link they had with the outside world and the link the outside world had with Russia. We opened the markets importing these products. At some point, when they started growing, the big players in Europe came in themselves and started setting up warehouses, which obviously affected our near monopoly of the market.

So, all those experiences under my dad, and working for Chief Nwankwo helped me, even in Russia. With all those experiences, it wasn't difficult for me to register a company in Moscow. I did that as an undergraduate.



My Mother's *two key* Requests *as I Left for Russia*

My mum obviously felt good for the opportunity I had to go abroad for higher education and be exposed to the world. But she had a condition. I recall that on the day of the send-forth, which was typical then, at the gathering, family members and friends would say prayers for you and offer some advice.

When it got to my mother, she prayed for me and said she agreed with what every other person had said. But she added that if I was going to Russia to marry a white woman, or to abandon my Catholic faith, that nothing I seek on the trip would work for me. She also said that if I should keep to my faith and not marry a white woman, everything I wanted on the mission would work for me much more than I expected. Then, she gave me her golden necklace and rosary as parting gifts. I did not need to doubt her. I kept to her advice and the rest, as they say, is history.

The first thing I did when I arrived Moscow was to locate a Catholic church. It wasn't like what you have here. I located a Catholic church within the American Embassy within one week of my arrival. I went to church even when the temperature was minus 35 degrees. I could party all night and still go to church from the party venue. Many of my friends were surprised I could do that. Then, it was just one mass a day by the chaplain at the American embassy and not only was I constant at mass on Sundays; I was also a member of the church choir. I am not a good singer, but I was in the choir, participating very well in the Catholic

community. Believe me, everything worked for me. I combined all those with my studies and made First Class in my first degree and distinction in both the Masters and Doctorate studies. Each work day, I would end classes and move straight to office to work. I had a Nigerian partner with whom I set up the company. It was a multimillion-dollar company. We did business and also went to school. We did that with humility. We made money and lived very comfortably as students.

Leaving Nigeria, I knew I would have to study something that was economy and business related. I gave myself 10 years to return to Nigeria. I wasn't leaving Nigeria with a thought of not coming back. However, it became possible for me to start visiting Nigeria within three months of my departure. It was like I never left the country. In Russia, apart from the core engineering courses, Economics was a much respected course of study. Getting into the university to read Economics, you had to sit for an entrance examination. Those who could not pass the exam were sent to read law, history or journalism. Economics was one of the most competitive and highly regarded courses at the university then. It was tough getting admitted into the department.



Dr. Okonkwo in lecture on Media And National Integration organized by the Enugu State Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) on June 28, 2019

“Nigeria is in dire need of real Federalism, not as a magical solution to all our problems, but as a platform for an honest and robust engagement with our differences by giving the federating units a deep sense of belonging on the basis of which they can willingly, and hopefully enthusiastically, buy into the national project.”

Dr. Okonkwo in lecture on Media And National Integration organized by the Enugu State Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) on June 28, 2019

“To continue to ignore a federal system of governance is to play the proverbial Ostrich with head in sand even as its vast body is embarrassingly exposed. It is like pretending that our ethnic and other differences do not exist or that they will quietly fade away if we ignore them.”

Dr. Okonkwo in lecture on Media And National Integration organized by the Enugu State Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) on June 28, 2019

“We cannot abandon the task of building our country even in the face of daunting challenges. That is the task for the mass media and all of us.”

Dr. Okonkwo in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) And Their Impact On Youth, an address at the 2019 International Youth Day (IYD) Celebration at Shanahan Hall, Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha, on August 10, 2019

“The most essential issue for me is the drive to recreate our educational system and focus on technical and vocational education, which are value-based.”

Dr. Okonkwo in lecture on Media And National Integration organized by the Enugu State Council of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) on June 28, 2019

"It was a group of brave young journalists who defied all odds and used their pen to defeat the British colonial empire. Today's journalists can again lead the charge for a strong, united and prosperous Nigeria."

Dr. Okonkwo in Managing Business In Nigeria: Challenges And Prospects; a Maiden Convocation Address to Executive MBA Grandaunts of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Business School, Awka, May 10, 2019.

"Do not let questions of trust be asked about you. Once you let that happen, you would have ruined yourself and perhaps, your business too. "

Dr. Okonkwo in Managing Business In Nigeria: Challenges And Prospects; a Maiden Convocation Address to Executive MBA Grandaunts of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Business School, Awka, May 10, 2019.

"There is no shortcut to success. You must walk the ladder up. While doing this, you must trust in yourself and also give others a reason to trust you. Your word must be your bond. Don't ever betray that."

Dr. Okonkwo in The Value Of Diversity: Restructuring To Save Nigeria, delivered at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, May 15, 2018

"Until we unbundle the governmental system and unleash the powers of our diversity on development, we may not really achieve our collective dreams."

Dr. Okonkwo in The Value Of Diversity: Restructuring To Save Nigeria, delivered at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, May 15, 2018

"Our country will continue to struggle until we agree to unbundle the federation and allow the component units, whatever we call them, to tap into their local talents and endowments to grow."

Dr. Okonkwo in Leadership And Service In The Nigerian Democratic System delivered at the 2019 Retreat of the Southeast Zone of Heads of Federal Establishments and Parastatals Forum, Golden Tulip Hotel, Agulu, Anambra State.

"People freely submit, and accept that you lead them because they believe that you have the competence and capacity to take them to where they are going."

Dr. Okonkwo in Leadership And Service In The Nigerian Democratic System delivered at the 2019 Retreat of the Southeast Zone of Heads of Federal Establishments and Parastatals Forum, Golden Tulip Hotel, Agulu, Anambra State.

"A leader is a servant. His task is to serve. He serves a purpose of either leading the people to desirable locations, or rendering service which in essence, helps them to achieve satisfaction from what they desire. A good leader is like a good shepherd. A good shepherd does not go to until that last sheep is in."

Dr. Okonkwo in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) And Their Impact On Youth, an address at the 2019 International Youth Day (IYD) Celebration at Shanahan Hall, Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha, on August 10, 2019

"Youths must become critical thinkers, thinking beyond their immediate environments and exploring opportunities beyond their immediate world; they must become change-makers because they have the numbers and capacity to make change happen through mobilizing their folks and connecting with like minds to bolster social and political action and change."

Dr. Okonkwo in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) And Their Impact On Youth, an address at the 2019 International Youth Day (IYD) Celebration at Shanahan Hall, Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha, on August 10, 2019

"Youths are inquisitive and always want to know more. Therefore, they must also be innovators, challenging the limits and exploring new ideas and new perspectives and proffering new solutions."

Dr. Okonkwo in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) And Their Impact On Youth, an address at the 2019 International Youth Day (IYD) Celebration at Shanahan Hall, Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha, on August 10, 2019

"Our youths must become communicators and be able to communicate the change that they want to see in the polity through positive social actions and engagements. And they must learn to lead the change."



Adjusting to Life in Russia

That was one of the most surprising things in my life. On leaving Nigeria, I spoke only English and Igbo languages. And I was certain I wasn't going to be able to learn the Russian language or stay long in Russia. Surprisingly, things turned out better than I imagined. Stepping into the country, I found that the teaching methodology was adaptable. It was not easy, but by the end of my first semester in the preparatory school, I was already proficient in the Russian language. That was why I could set up my business and manage my company in the second year at the university. I was able to communicate fluently in Russian language by the end of my first year in the country. Even today, I still speak and write the language fluently.



Academic

Pursuits in Russia

My first and second degrees were in Economics at the Peoples Friendship University in Moscow; the number one university in Russia, in America's Ivy League class. It had the highest concentration of foreign students than any other university in the world. When I was there, we had students from 156 countries from across all the continents and the education was top notch. Everything was provided for your learning. The teaching methodology was cool. We had head teachers whose job was to help attend to your specific educational needs. If you visit the website of the university today, you will discover that it has over 600 full professors. The university is training ground for world leaders. It has produced over eight presidents in different countries and also top Russian leaders in all spheres of life. Majority of books used at the university are written by the professors themselves. As a student, you know the entry and the terminal date of your course. No strikes. The libraries were well-stocked with books and other excellent resources. Everything was provided for you to study free of charge. Besides studying for a degree, you are trained to be creative and to learn critical life and leadership skills to solve problems and create opportunities.

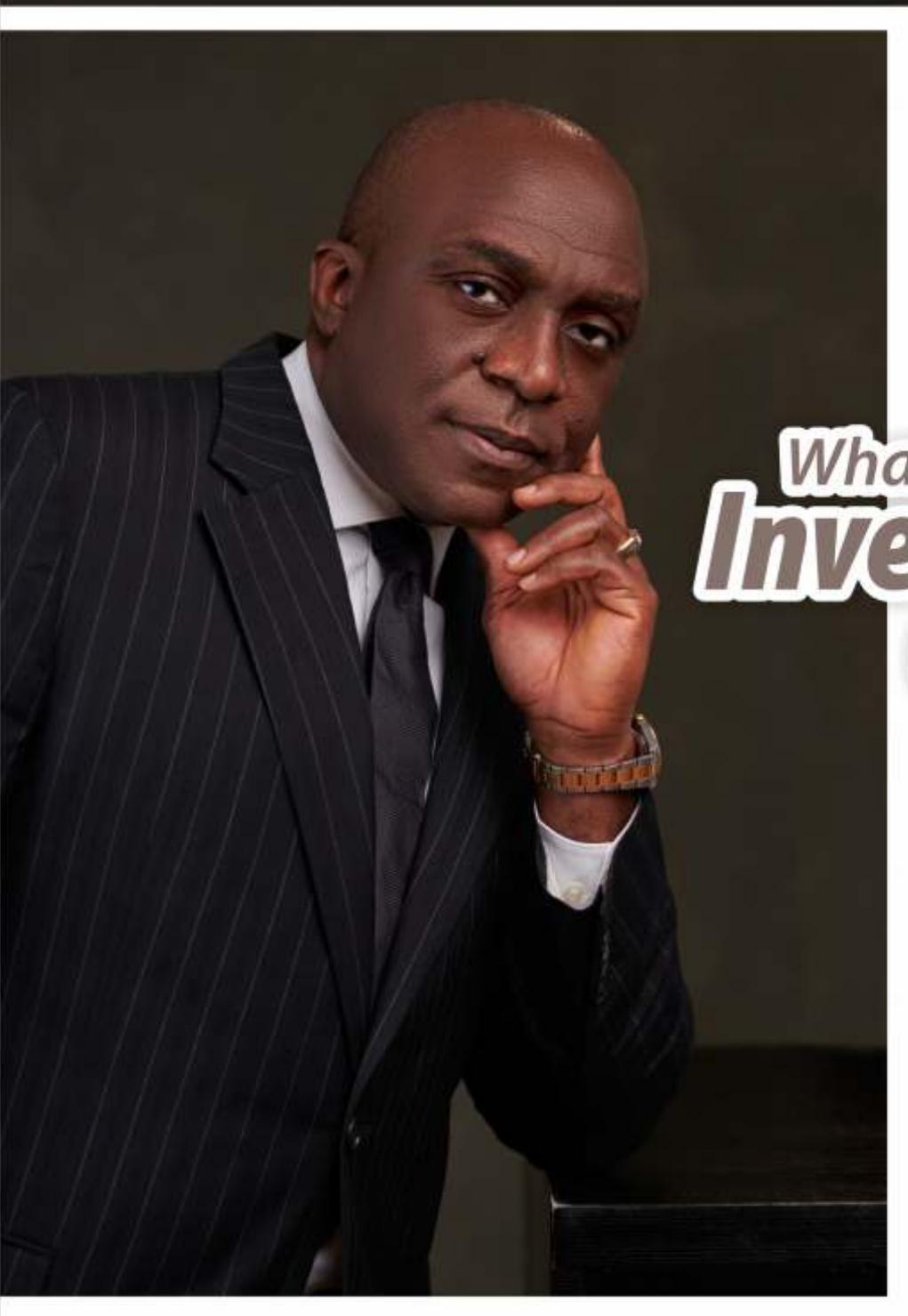
So, when I completed my Masters, I continued in the same university on the same scholarship for my doctorate in economics. I should actually be having a double doctorate. What happened was that as part of my course degree work -my course works and my thesis, from my first year till my Master's degree in the university was on Nigeria. I was writing on the Structural Adjustment Programme and Strategic Planning. At the time, there were only a few Structural Adjustment Programmes around the world including Ghana and Nigeria. Russia, undergoing transition at the time, was keen to learn about economic programmes in other parts of the world. So, when I introduced different phases of it for my PhD course

work, my Professors showed a lot of interest. Lectures were given in Russian language, same with examinations. But because of the interest they had in my work- the materials I had were written in English without Russian translations- they gave me a waiver to write my course works in English so they could get the raw version of it. Many of the professors proficient in written and spoken English. So, they wanted to see my coursework in English before translation into Russian language.

During my master's degree, part of the course work I did for my first degree, formed the first and second chapters of my course work for the master's degree. Then, I did my conclusion with recent developments in the Nigerian economy. So, when I went for my doctorate in economics, after writing all my examinations, and in the course of my continued research, I discovered that I had exhausted the entire material that was of any interest on anything that had to do with SAP on chapter 2 of my doctoral thesis. At about that time, a crisis of governance had come up in Nigeria on account of the political transition programme and the push to get the military government of President Ibrahim Babangida out. With the success of the push and with him out of power, I knew there would be nothing else to expect from government about SAP. So, I lost interest in researching SAP because it would not give me the quality conclusion I was hoping to achieve. At that point I was already on Chapter 3 of my doctoral thesis in economics (you see the reason I said I was close to a Ph.D in Economics); Then came the Gen. Sani Abacha regime and his transition to civil rule programme.

That was what caused me to move from Economics to Political Science. I did my doctorate in Political Science and International Relations with bias in Political Science. As a result, I had to choose a new topic -The Role of Civil Society in Transition to Civil Rule. For this, I got enrolled in the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of International Relations and World Economy. That was where eventually I pursued my doctorate studies and it turned out to be a great experience. No scholarship was available for this course, so I had to pay privately.





What Drives My **Investment Choices**

What actually determines my investment interest is not purely commercial. Of course, every investor considers commercial success. But honestly speaking, I am not primarily driven by profit. I try to provide services and also engage in investment that is at peace with my own ethical values.

If you look at The Dome, though I am neither an entertainer nor a showbiz person, I felt that having been exposed in Europe and coming into Abuja for the first time in 1997, and seeing what people do in the name of relaxation, which was just sit opposite each other and drink, I saw a big vacuum; the need to bring to Nigeria a somewhat spiritual dimension to relaxation which was solely lacking. That was what necessitated the actions that led to the setting up of The Dome. We also have investments in Technology, Security, Aviation and a few other sectors. However, those things I put my money into are those that must satisfy my passion to offer service and meet standards that do not contradict my personal values. I create the business, set up a management team, share my vision with the team and let them drive it. For instance, I have had the experience of being denied entry to certain programs at The Dome by the managers because they did not know me personally. On each of those occasions, I had to step aside and make a call before I was identified and let in. I don't have to be physically present or known to all my managers for the investment to grow. Once the managers buy into your vision, they drive it.



My Job into P

In serious societies, politics is for decent people because if you are not decent and venture into politics, you will be exposed so badly that every single bad act you have been involved in will be exhumed. That is why, in such societies, those who have skeletons in their cupboards avoid politics. When you are in politics, you're thoroughly scrutinized, whatever you do comes to light and everyone knows. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, politicians tend to get away with a lot of things which has created massive governance crises in our country

Journey Politics



leaving the citizens very despondent about public life. However, I do not for once, think that politics is or should be for bad people. On the contrary, politics should be for decent people with strong morals and clear vision of how they want to positively impact society. Look at great names like Dr. Michael I. Okpara, the first premier of Eastern Region and the inimitable Nelson Mandela of South Africa. These are men with strong moral compass who brought those cherished attributes to political governance.

For me therefore, it is not about staying out and complaining that indecent people are running things. If you think things aren't

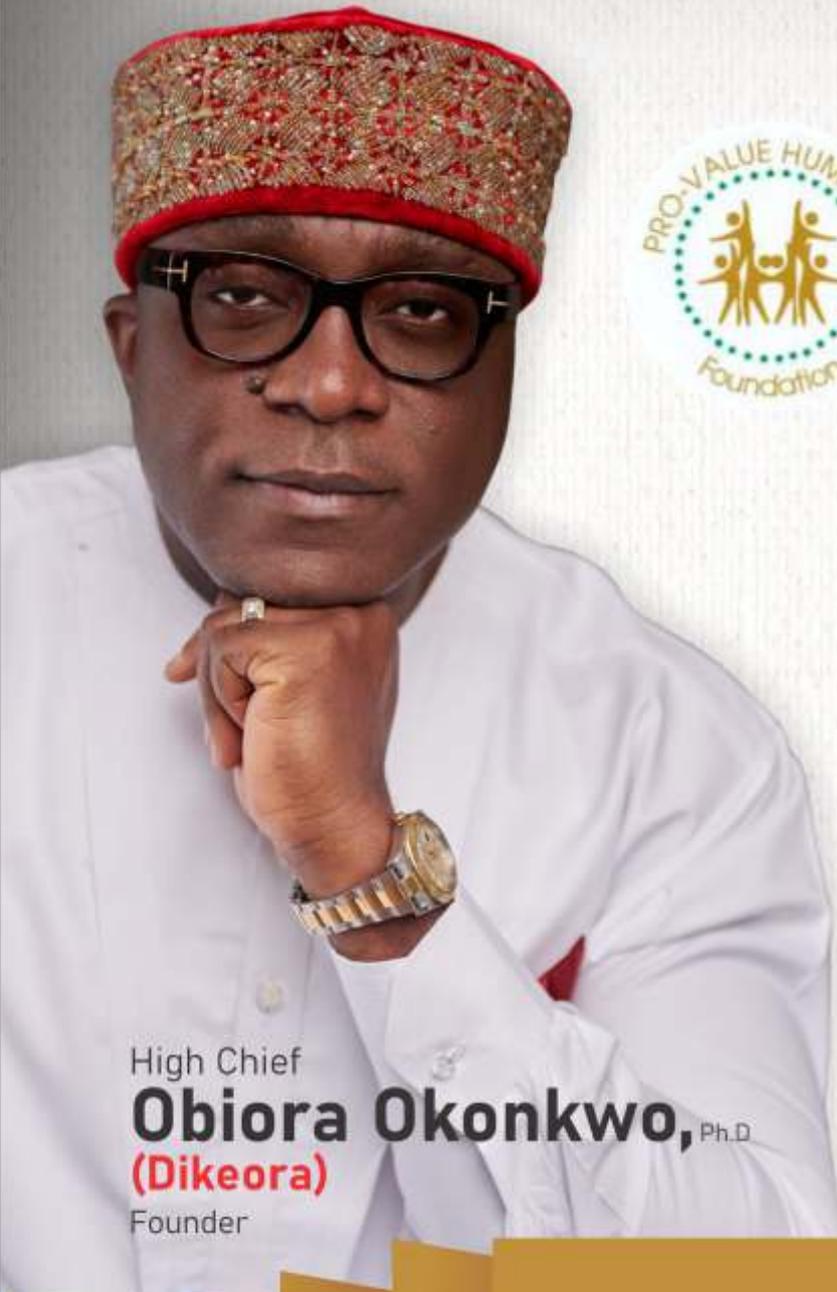
getting better, why stay out and allow those you think are indecent to rule you? It was the English philosopher Edmund Burke who said that evil thrive because good men (I replace men with people) do nothing.

Remember, there is only so much one can do as an individual with personal resources. But in politics, you have a bigger platform to impact, even transform society at large. If you think I am doing well as an individual in helping change lives, it presupposes that any opportunity I get in public office will be an opportunity for service, to do greater things for the common good.

There are not many political

scientists who are in politics today. Most of those who are in politics today have little understanding of politics as a science, but those who called it a science are not fools.

Unfortunately, our politics has been bastardized, turned into thuggery and full of deceit and fraud and often, violent. That is not politics. Those you see doing such things in the name of politics, are only bringing their individual character flaws to politics. When you study how politics is expressed in truly democratic countries and what politics as a science is, you will know that what you see here in the name of politics is a misnomer.



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Motto: Recreating Humanity

"I will encourage us to give back to our communities in every way we deem pleasing. I also encourage our youths, especially those who are challenged by the desire to make it big, to be a lot more circumspect and work for the sweet benefits of their sweats, not their guns; of their brains, not their brawns. And as you do so, don't ever forget that "God loves a cheerful giver".

-Okonkwo

High Chief
Obiora Okonkwo, Ph.D.
(Dikeora)
Founder

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To create a society where the human person is at the center of development

OUR MISSION:

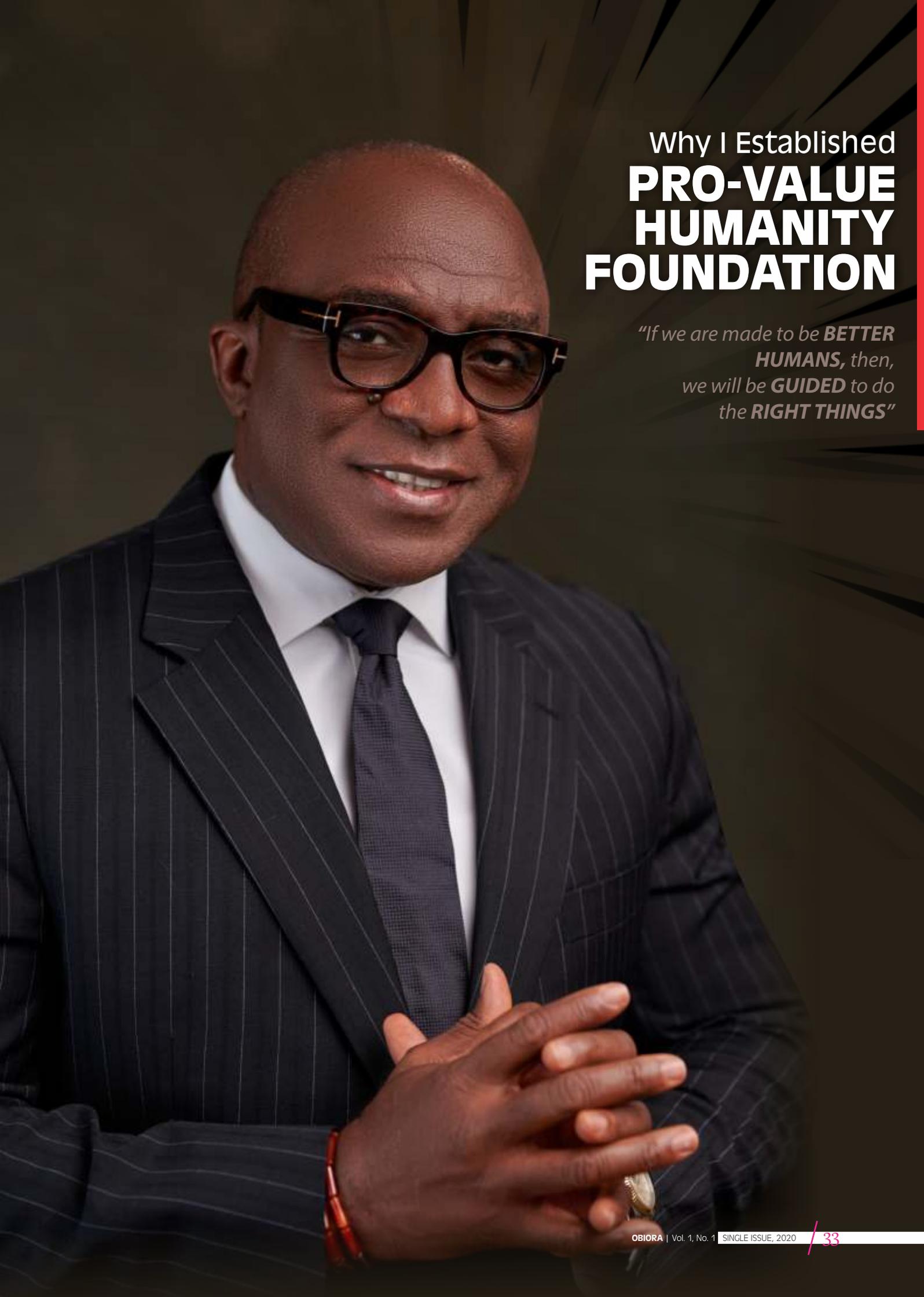
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Why I Established
**PRO-VALUE
HUMANITY
FOUNDATION**

*"If we are made to be **BETTER
HUMANS**, then,
we will be **GUIDED** to do
the **RIGHT THINGS**"*



Why I Established **PRO-VALUE HUMANITY FOUNDATION**

When we conceptualized this foundation, my mind told me that all we need to be and all that we require to be what we want to be, are embedded in our values, our virtues. If we are made to be better humans, then, we will be guided to do the right things. I believe that the means must justify the end and not the other way round. I also discovered that around us, there seem to be many initiatives aimed at empowerment. However, if you have all the empowerment but fail to pay attention to values, then, there is a fundamental problem. It is like a house with a very defective foundation; everything will ultimately come crashing down unless you fix the foundational problem. So, I strongly believe we should begin with addressing the basics.

Remember that when the colonialists came, they did not just come with education, they also came with religion which established moral rules. It is the same with Traditional African Religion. You are born into a moral society; a morally conscious environment. This means that one can, guided by those moral values, be the best. Of course, we can all be of service to humanity irrespective of our status or positions in life. The question is: how do we use our power or position, talent and resources to positively impact humanity with the ultimate goal of making the kingdom of God? Because for me, the sole ambition I have left in this world is to go to heaven. This is in recognition that I am, like everyone else a sinner, seeking God's grace every day, to be a better human being. Consequently, every single engagement I have now in life is about the things that could help me earn a ticket to heaven. So Pro-Value Humanity Foundation strives to place ethics at the centre of everything we do as individuals and as a society.



My Role

Models

I have been mainly guided by biblical principles. Those are what have guided me mostly. They have helped shape the roadmap of my life. However, some of the personalities that stood out for me include Dr. M. I. Okpara, Mother Teresa of India and Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Without drawing up a long list, these three persons have had greatest influence on me. I am also constantly under the guidance of my father in faith who is an Archbishop in the Catholic Church.



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On Philanthropic Works,
**Igbo Culture
and Religion**

On Philanthropic Works,
**Igbo Culture
and Religion**



I believe that all I am is God's. All I want is to belong to him and everything I have belongs to him. My upbringing made it clear to me that in everything, in every situation; you must always give thanks to God. In the course of doing that, you must share with others. Being a person who believes in the value of culture, living a contented and fulfilled life cannot be complete for me without embracing all these. That's what is manifested in my annual thanksgiving and new yam festival. I do these to manifest those feelings. A people without culture are like a people without identity. For me, having risen to this level in my life and knowing that my culture contributed to it, I appreciate it and I love to

proudly bring it before everyone and make others to appreciate the values that our culture holds for us. This is what drives my passion for the annual activities.

I am a Catholic and I don't know that the Catholic Church abhors cultural identification. For your information, even in the seminaries where our priests are trained, they have cultural dances, masquerades etc. There is nothing wrong with them. There is nothing fetish with the things we do in that direction. At our new yam festivals, we begin with Holy Mass often featuring a large number of priests. In fact, we had a Bishop presiding at the last



outing. It is something I am proud of because it is about celebrating ourselves. For those who may have doubts, I invite them to join me in the next edition and see for themselves. Our activities in this direction have inspired others. I know of friends in the Diaspora who are proud of what we are doing in this regard and have sent words of encouragement with pledges to get involved in the dissemination of information, including audio visuals, about the Igbo culture. Some people are beginning to see the possibility of decency in our culture, one that is insulated from fetish appeals and dirt. As I travel round the world, I find that real people don't eschew their cultures. They do all they can to promote and preserve them and even invite us to appreciate what they are doing. To that extent, we have done quite well in the promotion of Igbo culture through our New Yam festival and masquerades. I have already received reservations towards this year's edition of my annual new yam festival. More people are welcome.

It is that same spirit of cultural revival that the Ogidi community recently came out with the great Ijele masquerade. We never had one. You know Ijele is the biggest masquerade in Igbo land. But we didn't have one before. So, I led the effort to have one. That is why it is named after me, Ijele Inwele. My traditional title in Ogidi is Inwele Ogidi Inwele. It was in my pursuit to take our culture to a higher level. Ijele is adorable and very colourful. We achieved that and the town went agog. I recall a man in his nineties who called me to express how happy he was with the outing of the Ijele. He apologized for not being there because of poor health. He commended our efforts recalling that the community made effort to bring out Ijele when he was about 10 years old. According to him, they had the drums and the dance group but there was no masquerade. He said they tried again when he was 14 years old, but it failed. He said he had given up the thought of seeing Ijele in Ogidi in his life time when we made it possible. The town is very proud of it and I am grateful to God for using me and others to achieve that.



Dr. Okonkwo in "Ndigbo In Contemporary Nigeria: A Social, Cultural, Political and Economic Reflection" delivered at the 5th Annual Umunri Colloquium held at The Civic Center, Enugwu-Ukwu; December 28, 2019.

"...while economic and political developments come down to leadership, it is also very important that the Igbo people develop a leadership recruitment process that leaves the voting public with the option of choosing the best among the best. The best here should be persons that have overcome personal want; persons who would not see leadership as an avenue to satisfy personal desire for outlandish lifestyles and previous deprivations; persons who hit society with new visions and bigger ideas. This ought to be the starting point."

Dr. Okonkwo in "Ndigbo In Contemporary Nigeria: A Social, Cultural, Political and Economic Reflection" delivered at the 5th Annual Umunri Colloquium held at The Civic Center, Enugwu-Ukwu; December 28, 2019.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I conclude by telling us all that the narrative on Igboland will begin to change as soon as the Igbo realize that no one will develop Igboland except the Igbo people. Therefore, we must take advantage of our place in business to create the political opportunities that advance the progress and growth of our homeland. Igbo business and Igbo politics must create the right mix to develop a leadership recruitment system that would work for the good of the Igbo."

Dr. Okonkwo in "Ndigbo In Contemporary Nigeria: A Social, Cultural, Political and Economic Reflection" delivered at the 5th Annual Umunri Colloquium held at The Civic Center, Enugwu-Ukwu; December 28, 2019.

"The Igbo must quit lamenting and begin to see the opportunities we have missed as new opportunities for growth. That was why I instituted a study into the Onitsha Main market as the entrepreneurial hub of Igbo business. I believe that if we re-draw our map and change our projections, we will be able, as Ndigbo, to see the opportunities available to us and use same to change our own narrative by ourselves."

On Being a Culture Enthusiast and Coming from the same Ogidi Community as literary Icon Chinua Achebe

“ Unless you do a DNA test to prove otherwise, I sometimes claim (after a glass of Brandy) that the Okonkwo that Chinua Achebe wrote about in *Things Fall Apart* is my great grandfather (laughter). ”



**On Being a Culture Enthusiast
and Coming from the same
Ogidi Community as literary
Icon Chinua Achebe**



However, appreciation and promotion of culture in Ogidi is not something that is pervasive. You do not need the entire town to come together to appreciate their culture. Sometimes, these things are primarily promoted by a few individuals. In Ogidi, we are doing our best to put our festivals on the culture map and make Ogidi the culture capital of Anambra state.

No doubt, we are very proud of late Prof. Chinua Achebe and we have plans to immortalize him

given all that he did to put Ogidi kingdom on the world map. I really believe that we have not done enough to take advantage of his global fame for our town (Ogidi), our state (Anambra), the entire Igbo land and Nigeria at large. We are challenged to do more for his legacies. If you read his books, you will see how he used the Igbo language and culture and created something great. He made us really proud and we must do way more to uphold his name.

OBIORA: A CULTURE ENTHUSIAST

Dr. Okonkwo in The Value Of
Diversity: Restructuring To Save
Nigeria, delivered at Faculty of Social
Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, May 15, 2018

*"Our cultural diversity leaves us with
options for revenue generation. But we
are not looking at that area yet because
oil is still with us."*



Dr. Okonkwo in 'Democracy and Development: A Prolegomena For Growth' published in OKWADIKE a 80th birthday commemorative book in honour of Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, first Executive Governor of Anambra state.

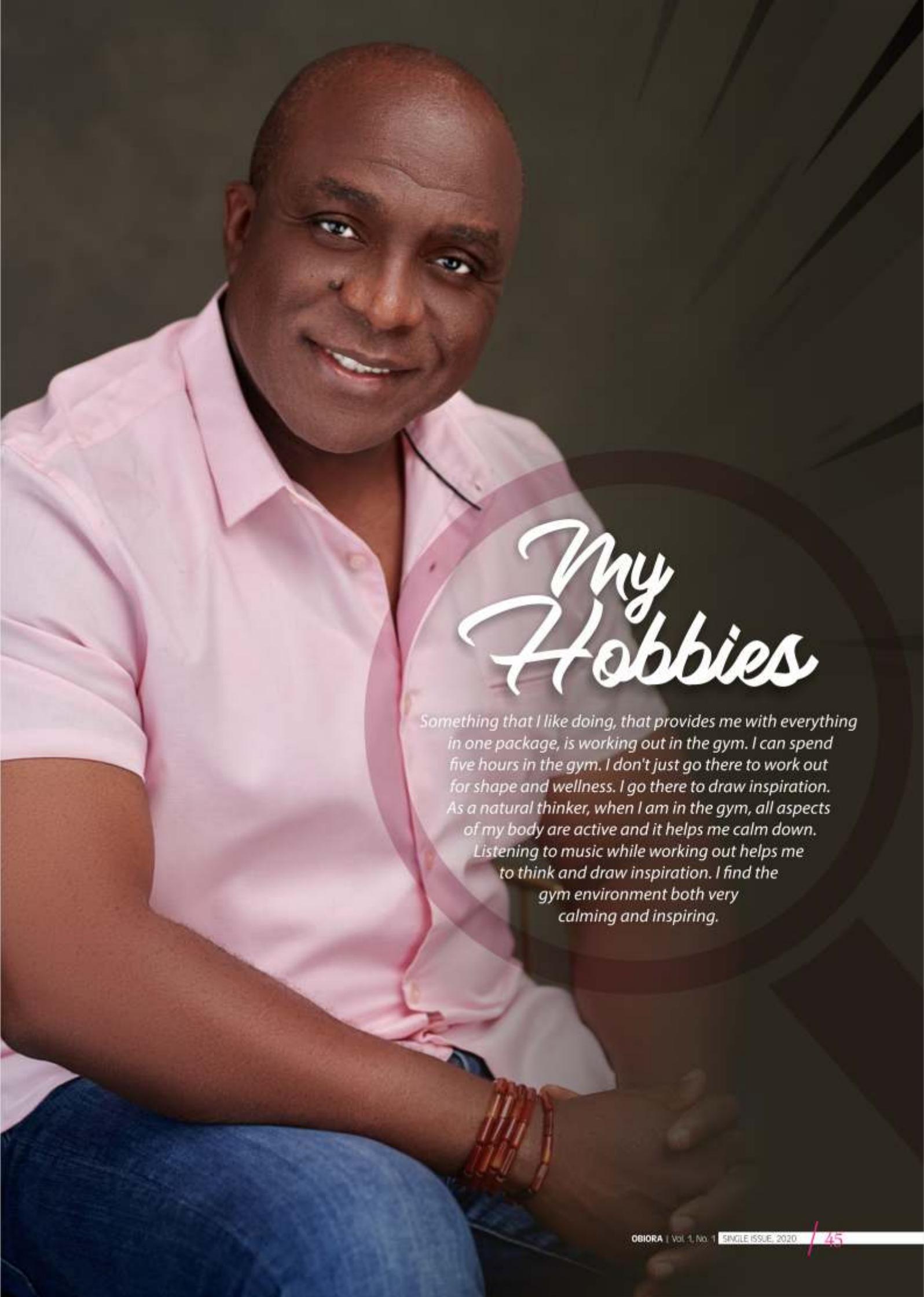
"What China has done, in essence, is to educate us to the fact that we could strive to design a democratic process that is based on merit, which alters the incumbent leadership recruitment process and berths one that promotes meritocracy through a selection process that identifies and elects the best of the best and entrust them with our commonwealth. I believe that Anambra state needs such a process. It is clearly antithetical to common sense that, as a people, we succeed in private enterprise but fail in the management of our commonwealth."

Dr. Okonkwo in 'Democracy and Development: A Prolegomena For Growth' published in OKWADIKE a 80th birthday commemorative book in honour of Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, first Executive Governor of Anambra state.

"...in designing a prolegomena for the future of Anambra state, we, the people of the state, must begin to look at government as a tool towards driving societal development. This view, which I believe is shared by many, aims to make us responsible for our development. It suggests that we must sit back and ask ourselves some hard questions and from the answers we generate, push for the constitution of credible alternatives to managing our commonwealth going forward."

Dr. Okonkwo in 'Democracy and Development: A Prolegomena For Growth' published in OKWADIKE a 80th birthday commemorative book in honour of Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, first Executive Governor of Anambra state.

"When we elect our leaders and representatives, it must occur to us that we are entrusting a set of people with our lives, our security, our resources etc. If we are deeply conscious of this, then, we would make the right move by ensuring that we design a system which will make us empower a set of people who will deliver the goods and show us outcomes of the errand we sent them. Like I had argued elsewhere, government is not for self-enrichment. Government does not aim to produce the richest man. It aims, rather, to serve the people in a most honourable manner."



My Hobbies

Something that I like doing, that provides me with everything in one package, is working out in the gym. I can spend five hours in the gym. I don't just go there to work out for shape and wellness. I go there to draw inspiration. As a natural thinker, when I am in the gym, all aspects of my body are active and it helps me calm down.

Listening to music while working out helps me to think and draw inspiration. I find the gym environment both very calming and inspiring.



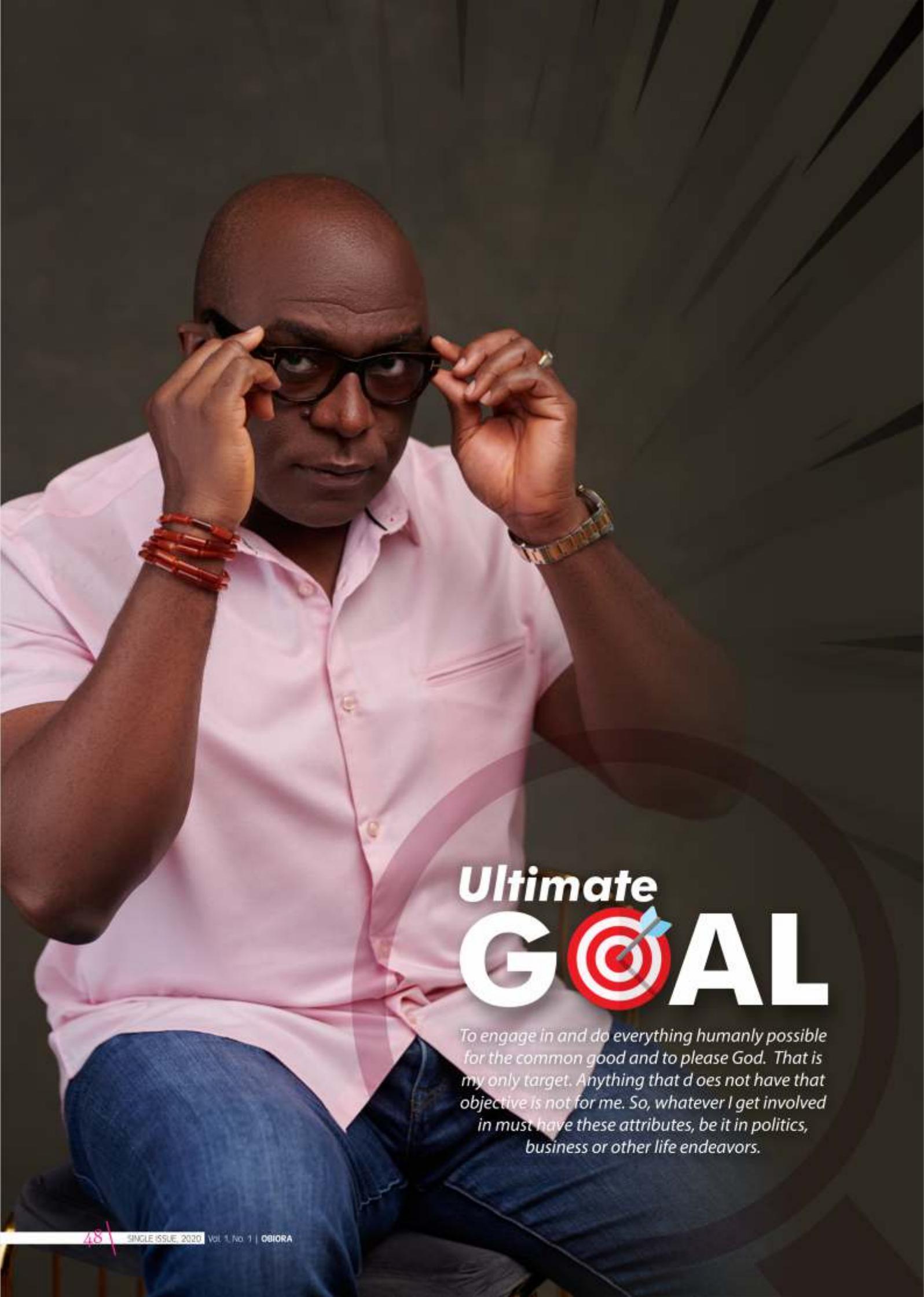
On Music Preferences

I listen to praise and worship genre especially, the Igbo ones. I draw a lot of inspiration from them. Seeing how that has impacted me, I decided to set up a praise worship ministry in the Catholic Church. It is called Catholic Divine Praise Worship Ministry. It was authorized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria. Our main objective is to promote those praise worship songs that are in tune with the liturgy of the Catholic Church. We have them already in the first volume of 200 songs (audio and book) and currently working on second volume. So, as you can tell, whatever matters to me, I try to multiply and share with others.



Biggest Turn Offs

Deceit! It repulses me. Nothing else repulses me more than that. I have zero tolerance for deceit, lies, and cheating. I can manage with a whole lot of misbehaviors and character flaws, but deceit and lies are absolute turn offs for me.



Ultimate GOAL

To engage in and do everything humanly possible for the common good and to please God. That is my only target. Anything that does not have that objective is not for me. So, whatever I get involved in must have these attributes, be it in politics, business or other life endeavors.



OBIORA ...Looking Forward>>>



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