



IN LOVING MEMORY

Jonathan Nwachukwu Obe

IbeNeme



A Tribute

Revisited two years later

“His hands may no longer hold mine, but his love will carry me through life.”

A LIFE REMEMBERED. A LOVE THAT REMAINS.

TWO YEARS LATER

The Words of a Grieving Son

Two years ago, when my father, Jonathan Nwachukwu Obe (IbeNeme), passed away, I sat down with a broken heart and tried to put into words a lifetime of love, sacrifice, and memories.

Today, life has moved forward, but the longing remains. I have come to realise that grief does not always fade. Sometimes, we just learn to carry it more quietly.

I return to the tribute I wrote in those painful days, with the same love and an even deeper appreciation of the man I was blessed to call my father.

These were my memories then. They are my treasures now.

A Tribute to My Beloved Father

There are some people whose absence leaves a silence that nothing in this world can fill. No matter how much time passes, no matter how far life takes us, a part of our hearts remains where we last left them. For me, that person is my father, Jonathan Nwachukwu Obe, fondly known as IbeNeme.

Daddy, I have struggled to find words worthy of the life you lived and the love you gave us. How does a son say goodbye to the man who made him feel safe in this world? How do I capture a lifetime of love, sacrifice, laughter, and memories in a few pages? I cannot. But I can tell the world about the man I was privileged to call my father.

I was the youngest child in our family, and anyone who knew us could see that I occupied a special place in your heart. I was your little boy, the one you protected, indulged, and loved so tenderly. Growing up, I never fully understood how fortunate I was. All I knew was that, as long as you were around, everything would be alright.

Some of my happiest childhood memories were the fortnightly journeys we made to Okpo, my mother's village. I remember how you would buy a gallon of palm wine before we visited Uncle Francis, my mother's elder brother. Those Saturday nights remain among the most beautiful memories of my life. I still remember the pounded yam, the delicious ogbono soup with goat meat, the palm wine, and the endless conversations between you and Uncle Francis. I would sit there, listening to both of you talk, laugh, and share stories long into the night.

At the time, I thought those were just ordinary evenings. I did not know I was living through moments I would one day wish to experience just once more.

Daddy, if only I could return to one of those Saturday nights. I would sit a little closer. I would listen a little longer. I would pay more attention to every word, every laugh, and every little thing I took for granted. I would not be in a hurry for the night to end.

Those visits gave me a love for palm wine, but more importantly, they gave me memories of you that I will carry for the rest of my life.

I remember our goats, sometimes seven, sometimes as many as fourteen. My elder brothers had the responsibility of cutting grass to feed them, but somehow, I was always spared. Daddy would find a reason to excuse me from the work. While my brothers laboured, I enjoyed the freedom of being the last child under your loving protection.

And whenever anyone offended me, I knew exactly what to do. I would wait for Daddy to return home. I never doubted that you would listen to me and stand up for me. You were my defender and my first understanding of what it meant to feel protected.

How I wish I could be that little boy again, waiting for his father to return home, certain that all his troubles would disappear the moment Daddy arrived.

I remember the nights I slept in your room. I did not need anything extraordinary to feel happy. Your presence was enough. There was a comfort in knowing you were close, a kind of peace that I now realise was one of the greatest gifts of my childhood.

Then there were our Christmas visits to relatives, from Isi-Olu to Umuozi. I would return with money gifted to me by family members, sometimes ₦1,100, sometimes ₦1,700. To a little boy, that was an enormous fortune. I would carefully count every note and proudly hand everything over to you for safekeeping.

You were my first banker, Daddy, and no bank in the world could have inspired the confidence I had in you.

I still smile when I remember the year my Christmas money mysteriously disappeared. You told me that a thief had broken into the house and stolen it. Strangely enough, this thief took nothing else, just my money, and somehow knew exactly where to find it! I believed you without the slightest doubt. It was only years later that I began to question that rather mysterious robbery. But that was the beauty of being your little boy, Daddy. I trusted you so completely that I never needed a reason to doubt your words.

And indeed, you were a man people trusted. Anyone who entrusted money to you knew that even years later, you could produce it in the same denominations, carefully arranged and tied with a rubber band.

Your honesty was known far beyond our home. In Umueya Edugu, our clan, you were the person entrusted with keeping the monthly contributions. You recorded every payment meticulously in your beautiful handwriting. You kept those records with a sense of responsibility that no title or official position could have given you.

You taught us something that no amount of money can buy: that a good name is worth more than riches, and that a person's character is the inheritance that matters most.

Daddy, you were a simple man. You loved peace, valued good company, and found happiness in life's modest pleasures. And, of course, there was your beloved Nkwocha, the palm wine you understood better than anyone I have ever known.

Your knowledge of palm wine was extraordinary. You could tell how it would taste at different hours, how fermentation would change its sweetness, and when it would be at its finest. Even with all my AI expertise, I still believe no algorithm could have matched your judgement.

Christmas, New Year, and Easter were never complete without the familiar gathering of relatives, friends, and well-wishers around you. People came to share stories, enjoy your hospitality, and drink the finest palm wine. Our home was filled with laughter, conversation, and the warmth of people who genuinely enjoyed your company.

Today, I think of those gatherings and realise that what made them special was never really the palm wine or the food.

It was you.

You were the person who brought everyone together. You made our home a place people wanted to visit. And now, whenever I think of those celebrations, I cannot help but think of the empty space your absence has left behind.

Beyond these beautiful memories was a man whose entire life was built around sacrifice.

Daddy, you worked so hard for us.

As a businessman dealing in abada (African printed fabrics and traditional wrappers), you travelled to Onitsha Market, sometimes leaving before dawn and returning close to midnight. There were days when you had barely rested before you had to rise and begin again. You endured the long journeys, the exhausting

hours, and the uncertainty of business because you had a family to provide for and children whose futures mattered more to you than your own comfort.

You bought land. You built our family home in Isi-Olu. You helped my elder brothers establish themselves in life. You gave us stability, shelter, and opportunities that came from years of your quiet determination.

As a child, I enjoyed the comfort of what you provided without understanding the sacrifices behind it.

Growing older has made me understand.

I now know that every long journey you made was time taken away from your own rest. Every difficult day you endured was part of the price you paid to give your children a better life. Every opportunity we have today carries something of your labour.

And that realisation breaks my heart, because I wish I had understood it all while you were still here. I wish I had thanked you more often. I wish I could sit beside you now, hold your hand, and tell you that your sacrifices were never wasted.

Life was not always kind to you, Daddy. Some people took advantage of your honesty and goodness. Yet you never allowed those disappointments to turn you into a bitter man. You remained peaceful, reserved, and committed to the values that defined you. You appreciated genuine friendship, including the loyalty of people like your dear friend Ciprin Odoh.

You may not have had every luxury this world could offer, but you possessed something far greater. You had integrity. You had the respect of our community. You had a family that loved you. And you lived a life that your children can remember with pride.

Daddy, I often think about how far life has taken me.

From that little boy who followed you to Okpo, slept in your room, and trusted you with his Christmas money, I grew into a man pursuing his dreams thousands of miles away in Australia.

Sometimes I wonder what you would think if you could see me now. I wish you could see how far your little boy has come. I wish I could tell you about the things I am learning, the challenges I am overcoming, and the future I am trying to build.

But more than anything, I wish I could come home and find you there.

Not because I have achieved something worth celebrating. Not because I have anything important to say. Just to see you sitting there, to hear your voice, to share a conversation, and to enjoy the simple comfort of being your son again.

I have come to understand that one of the deepest pains of losing a parent is realising that life continues to move forward while the person you most want to share it with is no longer there.

There will be achievements you will never hear me announce. There will be milestones I will reach without seeing the joy on your face. There will be days when all I want is to hear your voice, and no distance I travel, no success I achieve, and no amount of time that passes will give me that privilege again.

And yet, Daddy, you are still with me in ways that death cannot take away.

You are in the values you taught us. You are in the family you worked so hard to raise. You are in every lesson about honesty, humility, perseverance, and kindness that your life quietly demonstrated. You are in the memories of our journeys, our laughter, our celebrations, and the ordinary moments that have become priceless.

I wish I had known that one day I would be searching my memory for the smallest details of you. The way you spoke. The way you wrote. The things that made you laugh. The simple routines that seemed so unimportant then.

If I had known how precious those moments would become, perhaps I would have held on to them a little longer.

Daddy, there are so many things I still want to tell you.

I want to thank you for loving me without making me earn it. For protecting me when I was too young to protect myself. For carrying burdens I never knew existed. For working tirelessly so that we could have a better life. For giving so much of yourself, even when life demanded more than was fair.

I want to thank you for being the kind of father whose memory brings both tears and gratitude. Tears because I miss you so deeply, and gratitude because I was blessed to have you as my father.

I wish I had one more opportunity to sit with you.

One more journey to Okpo.

One more Christmas at home.

One more evening listening to your conversations.

One more chance to hear you call me.

One more chance to say, "Daddy, thank you for everything."

But life has taught me that some wishes will remain wishes, and some people leave us with a love so great that even a lifetime is not enough to stop missing them.

You gave us the best you could, Daddy. Perhaps you never imagined that the little things you did would become the memories your children would treasure most. But they have. And long after the money, the business, and the material things have faded from our minds, the love you gave us will remain.

I pray that wherever your soul rests, you have found the peace you so richly deserve. I pray that you know how much you were loved, how deeply you are missed, and how proud we are to be your children.

Your story did not end when you closed your eyes for the last time. It continues in all of us.

And as for me, Daddy, no matter how old I become, no matter what I achieve, and no matter where in the world life takes me, a part of me will always remain that little boy who felt safest sleeping in your room, who waited for you to come home whenever something went wrong, and who believed that as long as Daddy was there, everything would be alright.

I know I must learn to live in a world without you. But I will never stop wishing that you were still in it.

Rest peacefully, Daddy. You have finished your journey, but your love will travel with me for the rest of mine.

Until we meet again, my beloved father.

Desmond's