

## The celebrant with his first and last employers



The celebrant's first employer, Alhaji Babatunde Jose (centre: now of blessed memory), hooks his right arm into Prince Henry Odukamaiya's left arm, while simultaneously clasping his left hand into the right hand of Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, Publisher of the Champion group of newspapers, who happens to have been the third and last employer of Prince Odukamaiya in the secular press. This photograph was taken at a "thank you" valedictory party held by the Champion group in December 1995, several months after Prince Odukamaiya had retired from the services of Champion Newspapers Limited.

### Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Almighty God by whose special benevolence I have today become the only survivor out of my mother's 10 children, the remainder of whom died between the ages of six and 21 years. She herself died in January 1952 at the age of 45 years.

Odukamaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

Henry  
Odukamaiya  
@ 80:  
In the eyes  
of associates

Odukamaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

RSIWI

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## Foreword

-----By Chief Rasheed A. Gbadamosi, OFR

SOMETIMES these days, those modern communication gadgets, namely, the gsm phone, would buzz. And anxiety would creep through, casting doubts on the wisdom or otherwise of picking up an unfamiliar number.

On this particular day, the balance of lethargy and wish to give life a wake-up, and a compelling lift were competing fiercely in my psyche. Should I pick up, once again, that forgotten biography I had been reading? Or should I resume work on that abandoned play? Or should that tune humming in my memory regain attention? Should I go for a walk, direction and destination unknown?

Presently, the security chap downstairs had interrupted my tangled subconscious thoughts to announce the arrival of a visitor, an intruder, indeed, who had invited me weeks earlier to participate in an exercise in compiling a sheaf of writings, nay, letters to posterity about his peregrinations through the world of journalism. Except that an appreciation of his life oeuvre be through the lenses of about 30 men and women whom he had encountered on his journey.

The names of those journalistic gurus stared at me as I flicked through the pile of readable treatises by names with whom I had been familiar when I, too, had flirted with the Timesmen of Kakawa Street of yore, unsure of which career I would eventually embrace.



Destiny indeed brought me in contact with several of the newspapermen and women under whom the leadership of Prince Henry Kayode Odukomaiya had brought joy, enlightenment and veritable knowledge of the world around us to the breakfast tables and our office desks in the mornings. He was indeed the newspaperman's tutor-in-chief.

But, on this particular day, I think he had made me an overture of agreeing to distil either a preface or a foreword from the pile of articles that had been birthed by several of the nation's journalistic experience to the nation's learning curve.

A chance encounter I had long ago through a long short story I had shown to the unforgettable Sam Amuka (Sad Sam) for publication had propelled me into appearing on the pages of the Sunday Times. By the time I had gone through the mills of Areoye Oyebola, Gbolabo Ogunsanwo, Doyin Abiola, FelixAdenaike, Segun Osoba, Lade Bonuola, Tony Momoh et al, I had donned the garb of one of Kakawa Street boys, unknown even to me that the invisible hand of the grandmaster, Prince Henry Odukomaiya, was at one time or another editing, fine tuning and beating those hurriedly penned short stories and economics articles into superior shape.

Gbolabo and I had struck a fine friendship in the corridors of Sunday Times. Segun Osoba had been my classmate at Methodist Boys' High School, Lagos, since 1956 and till date it is always a joy to have a banter with him on public affairs. Undoubtedly his journalistic exploits had benefited from the early tending care of Prince Odukomaiya.

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Lade Bonuola (Ladbone), the quintessential editing guru and wordsmith, has shown in this book his endearing prose style and the prowess bestowed on him by Prince Odukomaiya lingers on. He has gone places, too, not unlike one-time pupil of the tutor.

It is appropriate for a man to have initially served the mundane calling of earthly existence and to opt latterly for the esoteric calling of existence.

Prince Odukomaiya, the tireless, has devoted time, too, for church activities leaning on his journalistic gift of God to give a portion of his life to editing a church publication. The reward indeed is now and in the life hereafter.

Well, the recompense for a proficient, productive and remarkably benevolent existence is recognised in one's lifetime.

This publication thus belongs to a slice of unforgettable journalism, newspaper adventure and a library material for all times.

Thus, great names in the art and business of newspaper ownership at various times sought Prince Odukomaiya out to pioneer the superintending of the Concord publications and the Champion newspapers. Life has never been dull. Humanity created the space and gave the prince the terrain to thrive.

He is the newspaperman par excellence. And he belongs to history indeed, humility and purposefulness personified.

Odukamaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

To whom belongs the glory for trying and excelling.

May 14, 2013

## Preface

-----

WHEN the Henry Odukomaiya 80th Birthday Planning Committee formally communicated its decision to me that one of two publications to be presented to the public at my birthday on July 10, 2014 was to be “organised and edited” by me, it did not surprise me at all, because I am the person best placed to know who, among the hundreds of the men and women with whom I was privileged to have worked closely during my 37 years in journalism, would be disposed to write about me.

Pre-titled by the committee as **Tributes to Henry Odukomaiya @ 80**, the book was to “contain about 35 to 40 tributes from colleagues and friends who had worked closely with you during your years at the Daily Times, at the Concord and at the Champion.”

Although I had, and still have, my reservations about the use of the word “tributes” (because I would have preferred “testimonials” to “tributes” which I would have wished was reserved until after my death), I immediately contacted all of the men and women who had worked closely with me since I went into journalism in August 1957 up till I went into retirement, not at Champion Newspapers Limited in March 1994, but as Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of the **AVMCC Christian Outlook** of our church, Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral, Ikeja GRA, in February 2013.

The essays contained in this publication represent the “testimonials” or assessments made about what more than 30 of such former colleagues and associates thought about me during those years when we worked together.

I have divided all these assessments into five parts. Chapter One contains an assessment by my only former employer (incidentally my last) who is still alive. Grouped along with this are assessments by three of my own peers: one of them a very well-established newspaper publisher and the others, a practising lawyer and former chairman of Nigeria's leading opposition political party who had earlier served for five years as Nigeria's Minister of Information and another younger colleague who, as at today, is Nigeria's Minister of Information.

Chapter Two contains assessments by former colleagues with whom I worked while I was a young man acquiring journalism training and experience in the course of which I succeeded in building the reputation with which most people were, later in life, to associate me.

Chapter Three contains assessments by a few of my former colleagues during my years at the Concord group of newspapers: three men and a woman over whose recruitment I had presided.

Chapter Four, like its predecessor, contains testimonies by two of the men whom I had employed while I presided over the affairs of Champion Newspapers Limited, which, significantly, marked my retirement from secular, paid employment as a journalist.

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The final chapter (Five) encapsulates testimonies from some of my friends and colleagues who bore the brunt of my accumulated exposure and frustration from all sorts and conditions of all my past experiences and upon whom I heavily depended for whatever success I made during

my 16 years of God's abundant grace as Chairman of the Publications Committee of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral, Ikeja GRA, in Lagos State, from which position I voluntarily resigned in February 2013.

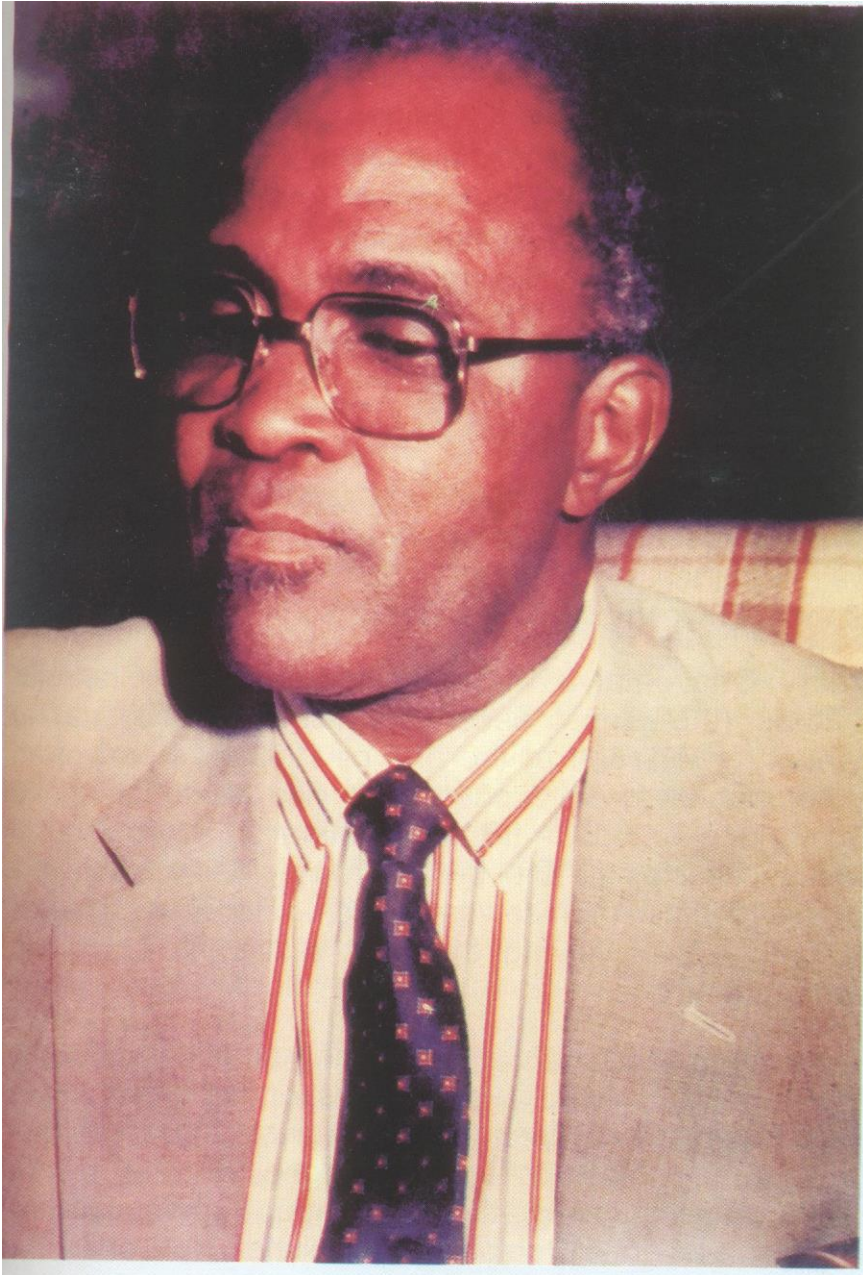
Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya

2, Oba-Nle-Aro Avenue,

Ilupeju Estate, Lagos State

April 25, 2014

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## Prologue

----- By Folu Koyi

BORN on July 10, 1934 at Odogbolu, in the present Odogbolu Local Government Area of Ogun State, Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya started schooling in 1938 at St Paul's Anglican School, Odogbolu, where his father was a teacher. The following year, he moved over to Holy Trinity Anglican School, Ibefun (his ancestral home) where he read up to Standard Four, the highest class in Ibefun at that time, in 1944.

In December of that year, his father sent him to live with his own youngest brother in Lagos and in January 1945, he was admitted at St John's School, Aroloya, to read Standard Five, moving to Standard Six in 1946.

Henry Odukomaiya was admitted to CMS Grammar School, (the oldest secondary school in Nigeria) in January 1947, and at the end of 1951 was part of an experimentation to expose form five students to the Cambridge School Certificate examination. It turned out to be a success as all 10 of the “guinea pig” students gave a good account of themselves, including Henry who passed in Grade Two, having the best results in Latin and Literature, to boot.

For such a brilliant student, higher education beckoned and so it was for Olukayode. However, his father had to send him to his old friend, Chief Oluwole Awokoya, then Principal of Molusi College, Ijebu-Igbo, who ran private HSC Classes, because the cost of such higher



education in Lagos was quite prohibitive. He finished HSC under the irrepressible Dr Tai Solarin, who succeeded Awokoya as principal of Molusi College, when Chief Awokoya was appointed the first Minister of Education in Chief Awolowo's West Regional Government and thereafter went to teach his favourite subject, Latin, as well as English, at Muslim College, Ijebu-Ode.

In 1955, the young, amiable prince secured admission to two prestigious higher institutions, the University College, Ibadan, and the University College, Legon, in Ghana to read Classics (comprising English, Latin and Greek). But it didn't require much effort to decide on the latter as it came with a scholarship from the Anglican Church (then known as the CMS).

At the end of the third and penultimate year in 1957, Henry came home on holiday and got a teaching appointment at another Moslem school, in Lagos, which was headed by Alhaji Raji Gbadamosi. By this time, he had developed a new pastime, writing letters to newspaper editors (particularly the 'Daily Times' which was the most prominent then). It was no surprise then that when the 'Daily Times' advertised for a leader writer, he applied without knowing the depth of responsibility that position imposes on the holder! He was invited for an interview and subsequently employed to succeed Mr. Ikpehare I. Aig- Imokhue (now of blessed memory). One uncanny similarity between the latter and himself was the fact that both of them did not complete their university education. Mr. Aig-Imokhue was a student of English at the University College, Ibadan, before he took up employment as the **'Daily Times'** leader writer.

The turning point came for Prince Henry in December 1957 when Alhaji Babatunde Jose was appointed Editor of the '**Daily Times**' from the position of the North Regional Editor of the newspaper. But it turned out that Jose was uncomfortable about anybody who did not have journalism training and so he asked the International Publishing Corporation in London (who were the owners of the 'Daily Times' at that time) to arrange training for him in England.

That was how he was sent to Glasgow Royal Polytechnic in Scotland for a two-year Higher National Certificate (what we later modified here as Higher National Diploma). Upon graduation, he was given additional practical training with the **Scottish Daily Record** (a tabloid) for six months, also in Glasgow.

Henry Odukamaiya was appointed chief sub-editor for '**Daily Times**' on return to Nigeria in 1961, which actually marked the beginning of his life-long journalism career. Several months later, he was sent along with five other professional colleagues from Africa for a nine-month course in Plymouth, South England, for teachers of journalism. He came back to head the Daily Times Editorial Training School, with Mr. Oladipo Ajayi and Mr. Areoye Oyebola, both later prominent editors, as his pioneer graduate trainees.

The ebullient writer was recalled from the training school and appointed Editor of the 'Daily Times' on May 4, 1969. He held that position until 1972 when he was promoted Deputy Chief Executive, Newspaper Division of the organisation. This was his designation until 1975 when

the Board of Directors of the Daily Times was sacked by the Murtala Muhammed military junta and 12 of the most senior officials of the front-line former national newspaper organisation were sent packing early in 1976.

For the next three years, Prince Henry Odukomaiya was out of journalism practice, but this was momentary. Like the golden fish which has no hiding place, he was hooked by Chief M.K.O. Abiola who invited him to set up the Concord Newspapers Limited, publishers of the Concord group of newspapers. That was in 1979 and the newspaper was rolled out of the press the following year. At the end of the third year in 1982, he left Concord and set up a commercial printing press while also engaging in some haulage business. This again was short-lived as Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, based on a recommendation from Prince Henry Odukomaiya's longstanding friend, Chief Duro Onabule (who was then the Chief Press Secretary to President Ibrahim Babangida), invited him to set up Champion Newspapers Limited in 1987. As part of the deal, he was sent to shop for the press in England and was to submit a feasibility report. He thereafter was appointed the helmsman at Champion Newspapers Limited until 1994 when he retired and has since been on his own.

The passion for journalism practice, now becoming unquenchable, Prince Odukomaiya in 1997 accepted a voluntary non-stipendiary position as Chairman of his church's Publications Committee where he also served as Editor-in-Chief of its evangelical organ, The AVMCC Christian Outlook from which position he retired in 2013 after 16 years of untainted service.

Odukamaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

The prince of print' is an exemplary leader, an epitome of virtue, an avowed stickler for rigidity, prudence and due diligence, a management wizard and a committed churchman.

CHAPTER

I

General overview of the man

1. Chief (Dr) E. C. Iwuanyanwu
2. Chief Sam Amuka-Pemu
3. Prince Tony Momoh
4. Mr. Labaran Maku

## Great courage and transparent honesty

-----By Chief (Dr.) E. C. Iwuanyanwu, MFR, OFR, FNSE, FNCE

MY relationship with Prince Henry Odukomaiya is a very important landmark in my life odyssey. Indeed, my memoir cannot be complete without eloquent references to Henry Odukomaiya's rare and outstanding leadership qualities.

Prince Odukomaiya served as my consultant when I nurtured the desire to establish a newspaper. He was therefore involved in the choice of name, in the planning, in the purchase of equipment and in recruitment of staff. I found him so transparent and honest and, above all, very bold and courageous in all his dealings with me.

I therefore appealed to him to take over the management of the new Champion Newspapers Limited at its founding in August 1988. I was glad he accepted to do this. He worked closely with the late Fola Ashiru, who was an Executive Director while he was the Managing Director.

Within a very short time, by sheer dint of hard work and exemplary leadership, Champion newspapers became a household name in Nigeria and abroad. Indeed it was a great delight to many Nigerians to read the views expressed in Champion editorial opinion pages. He immediately established in the Champion stable the following newspapers: (a) Daily Champion (b) Weekly Champion and (c) Sporting Champion. Those were the golden days of Champion

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Newspapers Limited.

May I therefore, on behalf of the Board, the management and staff of Champion Newspapers Limited, wish our founding Managing Director, Prince Henry Odukomaiya, a happy 80th birthday anniversary.

The story and life of Henry Odukomaiya is typical of great patriots who made great sacrifices for Nigeria, who, at old age, are left absolutely on their own. Odukomaiya throughout his career as a journalist and manager of men and other people's money played a major role in educating, informing and entertaining Nigerians. Henry Odukomaiya and other patriots like him deserve to be honoured by Nigeria.

I wish him many more years of peace, happiness and good health.

■ *Chief Iwuanyanwu is the founder, Publisher and Executive Chairman of Champion Newspapers Limited.*

## A dear old friend and colleague

-----By Chief Sam Amuka-Pemu

HENRY calls me and says: “Look, Sam, some friends have decided to produce my biography to mark my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. I'd like you to write a testimony about me in it. I mean a testimony, not a tribute.”

“So what does that mean?” I ask him. “What's the difference between a testimony and a tribute, especially at your age? What am I going to say about you now that is different from what I'd say as tribute at your funeral; or you would say at my burial, depending on who goes first?”

“Oh”, he says, “a tribute is all compliment and praise of the subject. You've known me for a long time. We've come a long way together, so what I want is for you to make a few remarks about me”, says Henry.

“Well, my dear Henry, whatsoever I'd say about you may be reproduced at your funeral,” I concluded.

Yes, indeed, Henry and I have come a long way together; it started at the Daily Times, way back in the paramount Alhaji Babatunde Jose kingdom.

Somehow, Henry never really bossed me, although he was my senior in rank. He was editor, Daily Times', and I was editor 'Sunday Times', in the sixties.

We were friends; bosom enough that I was bestman at his first



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marriage which CRASHED after some years with four grown and well educated children. (By the way, another friend's wedding, that of the highly revered Senator Uche Chukwumerije, of which I was bestman, also crashed; so, be warned!)

Henry went to several training courses in journalism institutes abroad and was removed from editing the paper to take over the Daily Times Journalism Training Institute from an expatriate.

That was when I left him at the Times in the early 70s. Years later, in that post, some top editors of the paper latched unto Henry's influence and caused him to lead a vehement protest (arising mainly from disgruntlement over editorial promotions) against the robust handling, some said dictatorial handling, of the Daily Times by Alhaji Babatunde Jose, the Chairman and Managing Director of the company.

The orchestrated rumpus gave the military government of Generals Murtala Muhammed/ Olusegun Obasanjo the excuse it needed to take over the Daily Times in the interest of peaceful settlement. Of course, the military government could not be comfortable with the popular and influential national newspaper in the country outside its control. Thereafter, the government appointed the paper's administrators and editors.

And people resented the paper as the government mouthpiece. From thence began the precipitous fall of the '**Daily Times**' till it crashed down, DEAD and buried. RIP.

In the years that came by, I was witness at a social function when Henry with some members of the Times protesting group publicly apologised to Alhaji Babatunde Jose for their action. And I also witnessed Alhaji Jose say: "I forgive you all, let bygones be bygones."

Indeed, we, all Nigerians, are the losers in the death of the '**Daily Times**'.

In the intervening years, with his high reputation and proven and distinct expertise as an editor and teacher of journalism, Henry became a serial founder of newspapers. He was sought out by the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola to found **The Concord** and later by Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu to start '**The Champion**' both of which publications acquired national repute in their heyday.

In the diminishing years, Henry has been publishing the twice-a-year magazine of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral, Ikeja, his church. I call that hedging his bet for departure.

Well, there it is, Henry; you didn't ask for a tribute, but a testimonial. At the last outing, we'll have a lot to testify about each other

.

- *Chief Amuka-Pemu is the founder, Executive Chairman and Publisher of the Vanguard Media Limited.*

## He combines all Elements of the practice of journalism

-----By Prince Tony Momoh

IT is difficult for young professionals in the media to appreciate what I am trying to put across to them when we place Prince Henry Odukomaiya on a special pedestal in discussing the history of Nigerian Journalism. Was Henry a great reporter? Was he a great production man? Was he a great trainer? Was he a great editor? Was he a great administrator? Was he a great midwife of newspapers outside the 'Daily Times' stable where he made the mark and influenced a whole lot of professionals including my humble self?

Henry Odukomaiya was all of the above but I will zero in on one area by telling you a story which will make you appreciate what it was that has brought us today to a time when everyone can get out of bed and be a newspaper publisher and reporter, even an editor, when, as a matter of fact, they may be no more than businessmen without scruples.

When I was employed in the Daily Times by Alhaji Babatunde Jose in 1962, I was full of pride, and I had cause to be. I had the teacher's grades three and two certificates, the London General Certificates of Education at the ordinary and advanced levels, and admission to read estate management in a university in the United Kingdom.

I had taught at a secondary modern school in Auchy (in

Edo State) before I resigned and came over to Lagos because the school board would not accept that I took up the offer to read abroad until I had finished serving the bond which was for four years. So, when I came to the Daily Times and I went into an argument with Alhaji Jose that his problem in hesitating to give me a job was that I had no experience, he later agreed to train me as a journalist. I did a month or so in the newsroom, accompanying more experienced journalists to their beats and also going to the police headquarters in Lagos to collect police bulletins. Then one day, I was asked to go over to the sub-desk. I would be a sub-editor-in- training!

I remembered Mr. Ikhazs Yakubu. He was a sub-editor in the Daily Times in Lagos when he came home, to Auchi on vacation. He had had to leave to work for the Nigerian Tobacco Company, and later the United Africa Company of Nigeria (UACN) where he rose to the position of group public relations director. So, I would be the second man from our part of the country to become an editor, having ignored the 'sub' part of it.

It is from here my story begins, not as now with Henry Odukamaiya, but with those who will go down unsung as the brains behind the making of a newspaper, those who are confronted with all the stories that have flowed in from the field - the news agencies, the organised and unorganised private sectors, the trade unions, the National Assembly and the state houses of assembly, the courts, government houses, government information services and ministries and parastatals, the embassies et al.

You had a whole line of production men who must read every bit of material coming in, sort them out for possible consideration for use. Some were there waiting to combine stories from different areas, others would rewrite what the reporters had brought in. The space for editorial material in the newspaper would have been determined by what the advert department had left for you as news space. The senior and chief sub-editors were there, and the assistant editors were high, high up there as the supervising bosses who took responsibility for what went into the different editions.

Mr. Mac Alabi was my first port of call as a sub-editor in training. Henry was not close by, maybe he was too high in rank for me to get close to. But I remember Mac because he was the only professional in my whole career as a production editor to have made me shed tears. And I tell the story for those coming up to appreciate what I say about Henry's superlative status in newspaper production. Mr. Mac Alabi had asked me to combine two or three different stories, and I had done them, by my own assessment, beautifully. I regarded myself as highly qualified to handle copy. When I handed it over to him, Mr. Alabi started ticking the copy and I counted as many as 35 such marks! "So, I had 35 'errors' in just one copy of a story?" I burst into tears.

What do you think you are doing, Sir?", I queried. "You mean I don't know what I am writing?" The experience with our English teacher at Abraka Government Teacher Training College hit me in the face. He would bore holes on your copy and you knew how well or badly you did by how many razor blade holes you found in your essay. Mr. Alabi made me more uncomfortable when he laughed. He told me I had

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written the story very well and that the 'ticks' on the copy were instructions to the typesetter...!

So, welcome to the world of the production team in the newspaper house.

They vet all the stories coming in, select what is to be used, hand them to the teams on different desks, decide what stories go to which pages, lay out the pages, fit in the stories, write headlines, create space for pictures and any other form of illustration, tell the printer, in their 'language' the type faces, the type sizes, the spaces they will fit into, what headlines to use, spread over how many columns. By the time you could boast of producing a newspaper, you must have been through the rudimentary stages of knowing the stuff to know, how to produce them, the house style of the paper, its mission statement, the editorial policy.

You must have known as many as 42 editing signs, the different names of the type faces and the shades there are to use, the work in the production room where the stories are set into type and they have to go to proof readers, the collating of all the material and arrival at the press when the button to print is pushed and everyone heaves a sigh of relief.

It was after I had become familiar with what happens in the news and production rooms of the Daily Times that I crossed Henry Odukamaiya's path. He was assistant editor in charge of the Lagos

edition of the Daily Times and I was the only sub-editor attached to him. With him, we 'spruced' up the paper. The first edition had gone about 4pm and would be on the road to Benin, Onitsha, Ilorin, Kaduna and other areas for waiting vehicles to take off to other parts of the country to ensure the paper was ready for breakfast in most parts of the country on the following day.

We started the last edition at 6pm. Henry was the boss and was responsible for the production. Many of my neighbours in Makinde Street (in Surulere area of Lagos) did not know I had any work to do. They would see me leave home about 5pm, and hardly knew when I returned. But Henry and I were there at Kakawa Street, working on the edition that would be read in Lagos and the environs. Before we left, the crowd at Kakawa Street would have swollen to bursting point. They were newspaper vendors and it was at Kakawa Street they all gathered to collect their papers, whether produced by the **Daily Times** or not. They took up all available spaces in the compound, even slept on the stairways and cooked their food outside the gate!

That time, if you wanted a newspaper, you said so and whoever you sent bought the Daily Times for you. Most of the houses at Mushin of the time belonged to vendors who made their money from the '**Daily Times**'.

So, when we look at Henry Odukamaiya, one man whose career in the media conveniently covered every area, from reporting to feature writing to newspaper production to editing to managing, you wonder which aspect to address.

The area of production was the one in which I directly worked with him during my formative years at the Times, before I went to the University of Nigeria to read journalism. By the time I returned and was made assistant editor in charge of news and features, Henry had moved on to training of journalists, and had been to the United Kingdom to undertake courses on training of journalists. He was to be recalled from there to edit the 'Daily Times', an assignment he performed with flying colours. Anyone who has time to look at the '**Daily Times**' of Henry's time will concede that there was no newspaper in the country that would stand in competition with the '**Times**' Henry produced. His tenure as chief executive of the newspaper division was eventful, but that there was trouble in the house Jose built and that Henry was in the forefront of the team that saw things wrong in the structure cannot dent the records of Henry in the Times group.

What brought out Henry as an accomplished newspaper guru by any definition rubbed off on the many papers he midwived after he left the Times family. He gave professional birth to the '**Concord**' of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, to the '**Champion**' of Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu and the '**Telegraph**' of Chief Gabriel Igbiniedion that did not take off.

In those newspapers that he brought to life, not even in one of them did words of gratitude accompany his exit. Those who thought of ensuring that their papers remained businesses and not organs for promoting ethnic interests showed their hands early before the papers broke even. The battle is still on, that he who pays the piper wants to continue to dictate the tune.



But as Henry clocks 80, he may still recall those years when at the **'Daily Times'** Pius Ayan would threaten to “lock up the chases” and accept no last minute 'rubbish' from the editorial department because he had his own deadline to 'catch'. Pictures of noisy mono and linotype machines in the production department, turning news copy to metal for the heavy duty presses may, once in a while, float back to Henry from the distant past. He wanted to write about all of this, but better judgment may have intervened. Because all that belongs in the past, belongs in an era that the new production techniques of just pressing a button to access what you want, has buried.

We who were boastful that unless you could produce a newspaper, you were not a journalist had been reduced to an era in the past where only history will remember us. And Henry is a prominent icon of that forgotten past.

*Prince Momoh, a former Editor of the 'Daily Times', subsequently served as Minister of Information and Culture between 1986 and 1990.*

## A crusader for justice

-----By Labaran Maku

I AM, indeed, privileged to pay tribute to one of the foremost doyens of the journalism profession in Nigeria, Prince Henry Odukomaiya, under whom I cut my teeth in journalism. Prince Odukomaiya is not just a journalist of first class distinction, he belongs to the class of rare breed Nigerians who espouse strong values of dedication, hard work, commitment, fearlessness and doggedness in the struggle to promote freedom, liberty and a just and egalitarian society.

As he turns 80, the 'Prince of Print' as he was fondly called by colleagues has traversed the spectrum of the media landscape, leaving behind his footprints of excellence and service to God and humanity.

He was the founding Editor-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer of two national dailies: The Concord and Champion groups of newspapers. It was in the latter that our paths crossed. For someone who worked directly under the legendary icon of journalism in Nigeria, Alhaji Babatunde Jose, the prince imbibed those salient personal and professional attributes of a consummate reporter and editor par excellence. An ebullient and consummate writer, a stickler for efficiency, punctuality, hard work, Prince Odukomaiya headed the Daily Times Editorial Training School where he actively took part in the moulding of some of the most committed and excellent post-independence journalists Nigeria ever produced.

My first encounter with Prince Odukomaiya was in December 1989

when I moved from Standard Newspapers in Jos to the Champion and was posted to Kano as a correspondent of the newspaper. He took a keen interest in my professional development and career as a journalist. What drew his attention to me was my regular features and opinion page articles which I sent to be published almost on a weekly basis. Though I was in Kano, he closely supervised my work and inspired me to hard work, higher productivity and dedication to the profession.

I can best describe him as a father and mentor who stirred my passion for journalism. He edited all my stories, features and opinion articles after which he would offer suggestions or corrections.

Although he was a hard disciplinarian, he was also surprisingly humane and caring. When he decided I should be transferred from Kano to the Headquarters in Lagos in 1991, he simply forwarded a transfer letter without seeking my opinion. I was sick and hospitalised when the letter arrived in Kano. I couldn't therefore move to Lagos immediately as directed by my Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief. I wrote seeking more time to recover. He thought I was dodging transfer to Lagos as most young northerners in public service did in those days. He therefore wrote me a nasty letter of rebuke in which he ordered me to move down to Lagos immediately or get fired. I was still in hospital when the letter came.

In a fit of youthful exuberance, I wrote an equally nasty reply, accusing him of showing total disregard to my welfare, and wondered why he was placing little or no value over the life of his employee. I proceeded

Odukomaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

to tell him I was not moving to Lagos until I recovered and was strong enough to do so. He could as well take his job if he so wished, I responded.

What followed was a surprising response from my Managing Director, apologising to his reporter for his inadvertent misreading of my true situation, and offered to leave me in Kano until I was strong enough to travel to Lagos. When I eventually did, Prince Odukomaiya welcomed me as a prodigal son and gave me additional two weeks to rest and fully recover. That incident further drew me closer to him as I further dedicated myself to service, trusting him as a professional father.

When I eventually moved to the corporate headquarters of Champion Newspapers Ltd in Lagos, I closely watched Prince Odukomaiya and discovered his amazing level of dedication to duty. He came to work very early and personally edited all the pages of the newspaper and always was the last person to leave the office.

He taught those of us who were privileged to work under him the true meaning of hard work and commitment to service. His insistence on the truth and fairness guided our professional judgment and contributed significantly to my growth and success in the profession. Prince Odukomaiya personally spurred me to attain success in journalism.

He stood by me to the extent of losing his job as the Managing Director of Champion Newspapers Limited over a story I wrote on the planned sequestration of the foreign accounts of some military officers because

Odukomaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

of the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election. He made an extraordinary sacrifice for the truth. That singular act of heroism in 1993 will remain indelible in my memory. And it was one of the big stories that propelled the struggle for the de-annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola but annulled by the General Ibrahim Babangida's military junta.

That was not the first time that Prince Odukomaiya lost his job under military dictatorship. In 1975, when the Murtala Muhammed-led military government sacked the Board of Directors of the Daily Times of Nigeria Limited, Prince Odukomaiya was affected along with a majority of the 12 most senior officials of the newspaper conglomerate, including, ultimately, the Chairman/Managing Director, Alhaji Babatunde Jose (now of blessed memory).

In all the instances, he accepted the fate that befell him with equanimity and strove to overcome the challenges.

His undying passion for journalism was evident when he accepted to serve as the Chairman of the Publications Committee of his church, Archbishop Vining Memorial Church, Ikeja GRA. He was also the Editor-in-Chief of its evangelical organ, **'TheAVMCC Christian Outlook'** until 2013, after putting in 16 years of voluntary service.

Even in his old age, he has continued to shape the community he lives in by providing fatherly advice, moral support, and has remained a role model for younger generations, particularly in the journalism profession.

Odukomaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

I urge Nigerian journalists to emulate the rare professional prowess of Prince Odukomaiya, by underpinning their news reports and features on logic, truth, fairness and balance and by upholding the tenets of the hallowed journalism profession. We should inspire patriotism and national consciousness among citizens from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds as well as political persuasions.

It is instructive that, in addition to the numerous opportunities for professional training in the UK which the man he describes as his “multi-dimensional benefactor”, Alhaji Babatunde Jose, offered to him, Prince Odukomaiya developed himself further on the job and excelled in the profession by dint of hard work, dedication and commitment to excellence. Media practitioners should endeavour to enhance their capacity in order to more effectively perform their roles.

I am indeed glad and humbled to pay my tribute to the “Prince of Print” as he attains the age of 80 years of meritorious service to God, Nigeria and humanity.

Congratulations, Sir! When will you truly retire, our amazing workaholic?

*Former Minister of Information, Federal Republic of Nigeria.*

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CHAPTER

2

The Daily Times years

1. Chief Ajibade Fasina-Thomas
2. Prof. Idowu Sobowale k
3. Mr. Sola Oluwole
- i 4. Sir Steve Omojafor
5. Mrs. Agbeke Ogunsanwo
- I 6. Chief Felix A. Adenaike
7. Chief Sola Odupfa
8. Mr. Oyinlade Bonuola
9. Mr. Kunle Elegbede
10. Pastor Gbolabo Ogunsanwo
11. Mr. Dipo Ajayi
12. Mr. Femi Kusa

## An accomplished technical journalist

■ -----By Chief Ajibade Fasina-Thomas

I NEVER liked the drab life on the sub-editors' desk.

Performing surgical operation on stories by reporters and bringing such stories back to life in a new garb never interested me as a journalist; to me, it was humdrum routine work, the dead end of a dynamic profession. It was no place for a gregarious reporter and I tried so hard to keep away from such a dull place.

But Henry Odukamaiya, the most skillful journalist I have known, saw me as a good candidate for the sub-desk of the 'Daily Times' at Kakawa Street, Lagos. And, against my will, I was sentenced to do time in the editorial engine room of the newspaper.

Long before he became the reference for newspaper production in Nigerian journalism, Prince Henry Odukamaiya had found his niche as the best technical journalist on the job. Newspaper production was beyond my ken, but, with Odukamaiya in charge, you were groomed, refined in fire and reproduced as glittering gold. It didn't take time before I caught the bug of the sub-desk parlance: "6in. x 4cols.," "9ems x 2cols.," "r/o," "box" and such jargon passed on as instructions decipherable only by the Linotype hot metal operators.





*PICTURE above was taken at a party given by a group of friends in honour of Prince Odukomaiya (extreme right) to mark his appointment as Editor of the 'Daily Times' in May 1969. The honouree's colleagues and best friends at the party (both now dead) were Mr. Kunle Animashaun (second left) and Mr. Mac Alabi (next to the guest). At extreme left is Mr. Oladipo Eso, then Chief Staff*

*Surveyor of the Nigerian Building Society Limited (now renamed Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria Pic). And, in the second picture, some members of staff of the Daily Times of Nigeria Limited at a party held to mark the retirement of Mrs. Yetunde Makanju (4th from left, now of blessed memory), Mr. Areoye Oyebola (on Mrs. Makanju's left), Prince Odukamaiya, Mrs. Agbeke Ogunsanwo and Mr. Mac Alabi (extreme left).*

Henry Odukamaiya was the zestful production editor who shuttled between the editorial room and the chase room with the swiftness of a gazelle. He possesses great intellectual endowments and no minute error, grammatical or typographical, escaped his eagle eyes. He was a dynamo who exuded an amazing capacity for work. While we stoked up problems for him, he combated our truancy by putting in reserved energy to get the job done.

The trouble with 'Oga Henry' was that he was always blunt. Too blunt. He gave his opinion matter-of-factly when you thought he should have been diplomatic. "That's a poor job, Jabso. I'm afraid, you have to redo that page." "And by the way, Victor, that word is 'mature', not 'matured' "....and there's no way you can get that picture in, in that size, John."

His expressions changed so dramatically and quickly as he moved round the long, arch-shaped table that served as our "operation theatre." We soaked ourselves in his reproach and effected the corrections immediately to meet production deadlines.

In those days, Tony Momoh was studiously involved in newspaper production rather than the art of public letter writing. I remember George Okoro, whose communist inclination had nothing to do with his skill, as a fantastic subeditor. There was the unflappable Sola Oluwole, one of the finest sub-editors in the mould of Oga Henry. The late Victor Dorgu was nurtured as a sub-editor by Kenneth Kohn, the British editorial technical adviser, from the London '*Daily Mirror*'; and was quite at home on the sub-desk.

There were also the late Selwyn Dikibo whose bowler hat reminded him of his student days in the United Kingdom and rightly earned him the "Selwyn Lloyd" sobriquet. The late Taiwo Okutubo and John Adollo wondered what they were doing on the sub-desk; the late M.T. Gbajabiamila would talk about football and Victor Olaiya's brand of highlife music all night. Joshua Ologunleko was naturally a teacher who treated stories as exam papers that must be properly scrutinised. The late Gilbert Offodile, heavily bearded, came in from cold Soviet Union and would have opted for another section. Obi and Unachukwu were assigned to the sub-desk after the Australian editorial technical adviser, Leslie Riley, had experimented with them, David Omoruyi and myself for his pilot scheme for training in-house journalists.

We were huddled in a partitioned room on the first floor of the editorial department and coached for about four months. Riley was to establish the training school some months later.

There were Tunji Fetuga and Ola Odulaja said to be contemporaries of Alhaji Babatunde Jose. Odulaja allegedly owned a bread bakery and

Odukamaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

this was the plank of familiar daily banter on the desk. Soon, I had discovered that the world is the oyster of the sub-editors. You acquired new tricks of the profession every day.

Henry took us all in working through Mac Alabi and Lai Mabinuori, (both now deceased senior journalists who made the night shift lively). Often, Odukamaiya was the butt of the banter but if he understood the jokes he never betrayed any emotion. He moved on like a bulldozer taking us all in his strides. He just kept on flipping through the galley proof with his red biro.

Working with Henry Odukamaiya and watching him at work was a delight. It was a great opportunity to see a complete journalist in action. He displayed an excellent understanding and usage of the English language. His minutes on stories edited by sub-editors were instructive. Henry Odukamaiya is the master you are happy to have learned from. He is a man of exceptional abilities whose sterling professional qualities easily rubbed off on any journalists who has passed through him.

His mission at the '**Daily Times**' was to produce a newspaper unmatched in all aspects. To a great extent, he succeeded in that task. He is a workaholic who relied not on his innate talent, but strictly on hard work. And because he was what he was, he wanted us, restless young men, to be super editors like himself:

The scenario is getting nostalgic now: The big editorial room starts buzzing with activities. The clatter of the teleprinters and reporters' typewriters fills the newsroom. The cacophony is a routine. It is past

Odukomaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

three o'clock in the afternoon and the daily editorial conference is in session. Soon, the day's surgery will begin. The "back room boys" will assemble to give clinical attention to the stuff passed to them. Beneath the camaraderie and the banters going on in a criss - cross pattern is serious editing and rewriting of stories from the news desk. The generalissimo of the night shift emerges from the editorial conference and passes on instructions through the Chief Sub-Editor. The production of another edition of the 'Daily Times' is in progress....

I owe a great deal of my professional career to Prince Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya. The experience gained on the sub-desk is enduring and has reflected positively in my odyssey as a journalist.

Thank you, Oga Henry and happy 80th birthday!

## The no-nonsense generalissimo

-----By Professor Idowu Sobowale, oon



HE looks harmless from a distance. Even at close quarters, his broad and almost infectious chuckles smack of tolerance and friendliness. But if you were a reporter when Henry Odukamaiya was an editor or a general manager or managing director of a newspaper, you would be extremely lucky if you did not fall prey to his “dual personality”, at least as the job of news writing and presentation was concerned. I once described him as an editors’ editor.

Please do not misunderstand me. Prince Henry Odukamaiya did not exhibit a split personality in the strict sense of social psychology. Far from it. It was just that he could not suffer a fool nor celebrate mediocrity. His patience with a reporter who could not perceive an attractive news angle was very short. It was even much shorter if the reporter or sub-editor could not construct good sentences. A couple of examples will illustrate the point I am trying to make here-

Some time in 1970, a reporter under me in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, wrote a story which I sent to Lagos without properly scrutinising it. The van that brought the following day's edition of the 'Daily Times' came with a letter from my editor. After reading the four-page condemnation of “my incompetence” as a chief correspondent in Rivers State, I had no option than to jump into the same vehicle and come to Lagos to redeem myself. A consummate editor and grammarian, he said he knew that I was competent but I was careless.

As he would denounce incompetence and laxity, so would he defend a good reporter that was being maligned. Also in the late 60s when I wrote a story that nearly caused Acting GM of Nigeria Airways to lose his job, the official of the Ministry of Transport that was seconded to that position was greatly troubled. He went to the office of the 'Daily Times' at Kakawa Street, Lagos, to complain that my story had seriously put his job on the line. He did not deny the story but said he only spoke to me as a friend.

When I arrived in the office the following afternoon, I saw a half front page denial of my story. I rushed into "Oga's" office with fury. But before I could open my mouth to speak, he said: "Idowu, calm down. I told Mr Ajeigbo that you were one of my best reporters. He confirmed he spoke with you, but only as a friend. We wrote the story to save a friend's job". I retorted by saying that he should at least have heard from me before denying my story. He mused and said: "Time did not permit." Of course, there was no mobile telephony at that time.

There were several other instances when less professional editors would have shied away from publishing "sensitive" stories that Prince Odukomaiya never hesitated to publish. It was only on one occasion he asked: "Can we give you a by-line?" Once I answered in the affirmative over the phone, the front page for the following day was cleared and my story was splashed on the page. The story which caused the Gowon government to order the disembarkation of a commissioner in Diette Spiff's Rivers State administration from a London-bound plane was an "earthquake".

Odukomaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

His attention to detail is phenomenal. With Prince Henry Odukomaiya, you cannot hide in the crowd. He notes the contributions of individuals and he acknowledges this with painstaking exactitude.

This recollection of my intimate interactions with him points to a few of the virtues that our journalists particularly our editors, ought to be exhibiting today but which we find in short supply. These include courage, honesty of purpose, fairness, attention to details, professionalism in all its ramifications and, most important, integrity.

Prince Henry Odukomaiya epitomises the popular saying that “the Newsroom is a mad house.” During production, everybody behaves like a mad man but once production is over, normality characterises the attitude and behaviour of everyone. For Henry, production time was no time for friendship and frivolities. It was time for serious business; but once the paper went to bed, the humanity in him exuded, although he commanded awe.

I was at an appreciation service for him when he retired as the Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of the magazine of Archbishop Vining Memorial Cathedral Church, Ikeja, in 2012. The testimonies of those who had had contact with him, even on the church platform, were not different. His zero tolerance of indolence, his passion for deadlines, and his ability to recall events and details rang out loud in their tributes.

I wish Oga many more useful years in the land of the living.

*Head, Department of Mass Communication, Covenant University, Ota,  
Ogun State.*



## A tough editor and stickler for correct use of English

-----By Sola Oluwole

PERHAPS one of the best testimonies to Henry Odukamaiya's distinguished career as a journalist is the comment by some professional colleagues that he was "the last Editor of the '**Daily Times**'."

For the benefit of the younger generation, The Daily Times of Nigeria Limited, founded in 1925, was home to the 'Daily Times', the biggest and the best newspaper in Nigeria for many decades. The paper went into decline after it was taken over by the Federal Military Government in 1975.

The appointment of Alhaji Babatunde Jose as Editor of the Daily Times in 1957 had heralded a golden period in the history of the newspaper. He subsequently became Managing Director and Chairman, and the 'Daily Times' grew exponentially. Alhaji Jose revolutionised the paper, employed young graduates and trained them with Henry Odukamaiya as the first Nigerian Editorial Training Manager. Henry had earlier been employed, trained and mentored by Alhaji Jose.

When Henry Odukamaiya was appointed Editor of the '**Daily Times**' in 1969, he raised the bar of professional journalism to a new level throughout his tenure. It was therefore not to be taken literally when some described him as the last Editor of the 'Daily Times', but as a

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well- deserved compliment as the last of the super editors before the advent of the computer age newspaper editorship, backed by editorial boards, myriads of columnists and special section editors.

So, the above quote is not meant to be regarded as a commentary on the performance or otherwise of those who had occupied the Daily Times Editor's chair after him, some of whom he had trained and/or mentored. With gratitude, I am proud to say that I was one of those whose professional development he positively influenced, and we have remained friends for more than 40 years.

Journalists are not known to easily dish out respect to colleagues, however senior they may be. But Henry Odukamaiya was generally acknowledged as an editors' editor whose leadership and mentoring skills were exceptional. He mentored many outstanding journalists and other media practitioners who went on to head media organisations or served the nation in higher callings as federal ministers, state governors and commissioners, heads of government parastatals, professors of journalism and mass communication, et cetera.

Ironically, it was his rigid professionalism and unbending defense of principle that led to his sudden removal after three years as Editor of the ***"Daily Times."*** I was the Assistant Editor of the Daily Times at the time and so I became involved in the drama that played out:

In mid-1972, I was surprised to be recalled from my annual vacation and instructed to take over from Henry Odukamaiya as Acting Editor of the Daily Times in controversial circumstances. Henry Odukamaiya

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was suspended from duty over a rift with the company's Acting Chief Executive regarding authority over the paper's editorial content. As Acting Editor of the Daily Times, I supported and signed the Editorial Department's petition to the Chairman/CEO protesting Mr. Odukamaiya's suspension, on the principle of editorial independence.

In his wisdom, the Chairman upheld the Acting Chief Executive's decision and re-assigned Henry Odukamaiya away from the Editorial Department. A substantive Editor was appointed for the "**Daily Times**" and I was appointed Night Editor. Given the circumstances, I decided that my position had become untenable. I subsequently resigned and left the company.

When I was "head hunted" and eventually employed to set up and manage a Public Relations Department for the Mandilas Group in November 1972,<sup>1</sup> I did not realise until well after I had accepted the job and assumed duty in January 1973 that I had been recommended by Henry Odukamaiya. I was in that job for 10 years before starting my own business, and, thereafter, my company was contracted as PR Consultants to the Mandilas Group for the next 12 years!

Throughout Henry Odukamaiya's tenure as Editor of the "**Daily Times**", I was successively Chief Sub-Editor and Assistant Editor.

Before joining the "**Daily Times**" in 1965 as a feature writer, I had worked in the defunct **Daily Express**, variously as a sports reporter, Sports Editor and Features Editor. In that last position, I was preceded as Head of Features by brilliant writers such as John Pepper Clark,

Frank Aig-Imoukhuede and the late Rev. Abimbola Odunlami. The paper's Editor was the distinguished Chief Olu Adebajo and the Editor-in- Chief and Managing Director was Chief Olabisi Onabanjo (of Aiyekoto fame) who, on October 1, 1979, was sworn in as the first civilian Governor of Ogun State during the second republic. He died on April 14,1990.

I had worked with and personally knew quite a number of national newspaper editors in my time and I daresay there was none better than Henry Odukomaiya.

Henry has a well-deserved reputation for being a tough editor, stickler for detail and the correct use of English grammar. But he was also a reporter's delight because of the skill with which he would turn good reports into great stories without the reporter feeling a loss of ownership of the story. He was a complete copy editor who ensured that the reader was never left with question marks in his head because he would have asked and got answers to the questions which otherwise might have left the readers feeling that the story was incomplete.

I know these qualities because I became a better editor simply by studying and following Henry Odukomaiya's example. Henry and I developed a close relationship soon after he was appointed Editor of the "**Daily Times**". His quick wit and intelligence made him a joy to work with. His writing and editing skills, his creativity and work ethic were the hallmark of his journalism career.

For me, it was only to be expected that he went on to crown his career by successfully pioneering, leading and managing two other national newspaper houses before retiring from active journalism in March 1994.

- *Mr. Oluwole, founder and Chairman of Interpublic Nigeria Limited, a thriving advertising and PR agency, relocated to the UK about 10 years ago, after the death of his wife of 30 years, Folasade, with whom he has four children. He has since been remarried to Joyce Oluremi Otolorin with whom he has a daughter. His only son, Ayotunde, is the current Managing Director of Interpublic Nigeria Limited.*

## His shoulders were big enough for others to lean upon

-----By Sir Steve Omojafor

I WAS, strictly speaking, not a Prince Henry Odukamaiya “boy” in my days at the Daily Times of Nigeria, given that, apart from my freelance and holiday job periods, I only got fully employed at the Daily Times as a sub-editor in 1972 and then resigned in November 1974 as Chief Sub-Editor, to continue my career at Lintas Advertising Limited, Tinubu Street, Lagos, just a stone throw from what used to be the Daily Times Kakawa Street Headquarters.

About that same time, big boss Prince Henry Odukamaiya was being re-assigned from the Editorial Department where he had held sway for over a decade. A politically- motivated restructuring saw him “promoted” to Deputy Chief Executive, Newspaper Division of the organisation - a position he held until 1976.

But, having heard and read so much about his exploits, it was a dream come true having a real life encounter with him at the “**Daily Times**”.

As background, having graduated with a degree in Mass Communications, specialising in print journalism in 1972, the place to be was the Daily Times and especially with the new management policy of recruiting fresh graduates into the organisation. I was part of the second set to come in, following the first set which included David Attah, the late Martin Iruabuchi and Doyin Aboaba (later Mrs. Abiola).

My case was helped by the fact that I freelanced for **“Lagos Weekend”** then edited by the late Mr. Taiwo Okutubo the whole of 1968, covering the Lagos courts for juicy divorce stories. The late Gani Fawehinmi would often take me in his car to cover his divorce cases around Lagos courts. Also, to my advantage was the fact that from 1969 to 1972 while I read Mass Communications at Unilag, I took over the popular weekly Campus News column from Mr. Gbolabo Ogunsanwo, under the pen name - Akin Bourdillon.

And so, it happened that on my formal entry into the Daily Times in July 1972, I sought out Prince Henry Odukomaiya to introduce myself and pay homage to one of the greatest journalists of our time

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As was to be expected, he had loads of advice for me. He admonished me that, despite a degree in Mass Communications, there was such a great deal to learn in journalism practice. “In our noisy Newsroom”, he warned “you will learn to mix and listen to the reporters”. He said, as a sub-editor, my success or failure largely depended on the quality of stories I got from the reporters, through the News Editor.

Words of wisdom indeed. With the likes of the late Chinaka Fynecountry, the late Toyin Makanjuola, Taju Danmole, etc, you surely needed to have your head properly screwed on your shoulders!

For me, it was a great two years at the Daily Times with very active support from my seniors like Felix Adenaike, Agbeke Ogunsanwo, Dipo Ajayi, Doyin Aboaba, Lade Bonuola, ESBEE, Magnus Bara-Hart, Kunle

Odukomaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

Animashaun and Alan Aroyewun.

For a father-figure at the Daily Times, I was indeed extremely fortunate to have big boss Prince Henry Odukomaiya on whose broad shoulders I always leaned, if anything went wrong.

It is then no surprise that long after Daily Times, he has remained my elderly friend and mentor. He ensured I was on the committee that planned and executed Alhaji Babatunde Jose's 80th birthday celebration, with him hosting all our meetings. And for his own 80th birthday anniversary, here am I once again, counted worthy to be a member of the Planning Committee. While therefore wishing him a most memorable celebration at 80 years, my family and I join thousands of his admirers in praying the good Lord to grant him many more glorious years of peace, happiness, good health of mind and body.

Hail the Prince of Prints!



## A closer look at the journalist and teacher

-----By Agbeke Ogunsanwo

MANY of my colleagues and I call him “Mr” but he loves to be addressed as “Prince”. He cherishes his descent from a royal family so much that when, at times, you say “Mr” he would look the other way as if he was not the one being addressed.

When angry with anyone, he stammers, repeating one word several times, at the same time gesticulating with his right hand, to make the statement or the point he wanted to make. He laughs boisterously when he is in good mood and wants to talk with you. He is never arrogant but shows off his confidence in his competence when it comes to the profession he so much loves, journalism. He is very, very argumentative when the nitty gritty of journalism is the issue.

Indeed, he drinks, eats, wears, breathes journalism. Journalism is his blood, flowing together with his God- given blood stream that makes him a living being. Besides being addressed as “Prince”, he is also addressed as “Oga” the appellation that overshadowed that of “Prince” with time, especially both in the newsroom, subdesk and at the printing hall of the Daily Times of Nigeria Limited.

I have been talking about Prince Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya, the prince of Ibefun town in Odogbolu local government area of Ogun State.

I first knew him in 1965. That was the time the Daily Times of Nigeria

(DTN) management was recruiting young school certificate leavers, male and female, into its family. It was the belief of the organisation then to recruit school certificate “graduates” interested in journalism to be trained on the job. As at the time, members of the managements of all Nigerian newspapers were not university degree holders. They trained on the job and were experts in the profession in their own right .

The Daily Times newspaper, at that time located in the Kakawa Street Office on Lagos Island, was the leading newspaper; the hot cake which every literate, newsconscious Nigerian wanted to buy every morning. It was the morning tea for many Nigerians.

The Daily Times’ became the stepping stone for whoever could be called a seasoned, reputable journalist. Many journalists who passed through the Daily Times became foundation staff of many other newspapers founded in the country at the period. Such papers included the Guardian’, the Concord’, the Champion’, to mention a few. Indeed, Prince Odukomaiya later left the Daily Times’ to put on stream the ‘Concord’ for the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola and then the Champion’ for Chief Emmanuel Iwuayanwu. To these places, some of Prince Odukomaiya’s former trainees went with him.

As said earlier above, Prince Odukomaiya was the Chief Sub-Editor when I joined the Daily Times on January 15, 1965 as a trainee reporter. Alhaji Alade Odunewu, (a.k.a Allah-De) was the Editor of the Daily Times’, Alhaji Ishmael Babatunde Jose was the Managing Director. Both are now of blessed memory.

Odukamaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

I was only looking at Prince Odukamaiya from a distance when I joined the Times family. As one of the new recruits, I was in the Newsroom attached to a senior reporter. Chief Theo Ola was our News Editor.

When Prince Odukamaiya made corrections on the scripts, while copy-tasting the reporters' scripts from the Newsroom, you would easily hear him.

We (the recruits) stayed in the Newsroom for a short period before we were moved to Cooper Road, Ikoyi, to learn the theoretical elements of the profession at the feet of Mr. Lesley Riley. He was an Australian, purposely brought to Nigeria to train the recruits for the Daily Times newspapers. Ten of us (seven males and three females) made up the school at Ikoyi. The classroom was the dining room of Alhaji Jose's official residence, as Chairman/Managing Director of the company

.

We came back to the Newsroom in Kakawa after about a year. At the time we finally came for attachment to various desks, Prince Odukamaiya was no longer the Chief Sub Editor. He had been sent abroad, to Plymouth, in the UK, for training in the teaching of journalism. When he returned in late 1967, he was made the Editorial Training Manager. The classroom was an office created close to the printing hall upstairs, far away from the big hall that housed the core Editorial Department.

It was this newly created mini school that gave birth to the then re-named Daily Times Journalism Institute, established at Iganmu in Surulere. I had a closer association with Prince Odukamaiya when

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three others and I were posted to his mini-school as the first set of the Editorial Training School. We were sent to this school for further training, especially in editorial writing. But we were taken through the newspaper production process from the scratch all over.

The four of us were Areoye Oyebola, Dipo Ajayi, myself and one other young man whose name I cannot now remember.

Prince Odukomaiya was very meticulous and articulate. He wanted everyone to be like him. He, indeed, gave me a heritage which I still cherish up till today: looking at things very critically and making corrections needed or observed.

Despite our earlier training at Cooper Road, Ikoyi, our new teacher started all over again with us, making assurances doubly sure that we became thorough-bred journalists. He indeed made us go through the process of newspaper production. None of us, by our training, would fail to perform, if called upon to produce a newspaper. Remember, newspaper production was not so easy as it is today. There was no IT system unlike now, when everything is produced on the computer. It was by manual method then.

Being the only lady in the first set of his class and for some other grounds, our Oga had a soft spot for me. Firstly, I submitted easily to corrections made on my scripts. Secondly, I was stubbornly adamant, standing firm by my reports when my facts are true and sure. Thirdly, I was always ready to go after any breaking news assigned to me, no matter the time, or the place.

Fourthly, our teacher's wife at that time and I had been neighbours before she married him. For all the above reasons, Mr. Odukomaiya had developed a soft spot for me. For instance, when the Alhaji Babatunde Jose Endowment Foundation Committee was named and Mr. Odukomaiya was made the Chairman, my name was among the list he compiled. Again, he gave my name to his son, Abiola, for inclusion on the "Odukomaiya at 80 Planning Committee".

We (the trainees) called ourselves by our first names but I was called "Auntie Agbeke" because of my contributions to the Children's Times' by that name.

My only visitor was the man whom I was later to marry, Mr. Tubosun Ogunsanwo, who became friendly with our teacher and both would engage themselves in deeper discussions than the person supposed to have been visited!

The other colleagues, including Oga Odukomaiya, had different visitors, mainly female of various shapes and sizes! On the exit of each visitor, we would always have something to comment on them. Areoye Oyebola would start the ball rolling with his vicious smiles. We would exchange glances, and burst out with laughter. Then all of us would contribute, commenting on the visitors. This was part of our journalism training: to be observant, as good journalists and not to miss anything that came your way. A vivid description of the visitor would make a good write-up as we would be asked to make a report of what we had seen or heard! You must not allow any information to pass you by.

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This was one of the ways we learnt descriptive writing.

I wish my teacher, who often calls me “Funlola” instead of Agbeke, more glorious years on this planet earth. May he continue to reap the fruits of his labour.

Happy birthday, my Oga.

*Not long after graduating from the Daily Times Editorial Training School, Mrs. Ogunsanwo gained admission, on the sponsorship of the DTN, to the University of Ife where she graduated in English. She returned to the Daily Times’ which, years later, seconded her to the Lagos State Ministry of Information. About five years later, she was appointed a Permanent Secretary in the Lagos State civil service. She now lives in retirement and is a devout leader of one of the white garment churches in Lagos.*

## He stood much taller than his peers

-----By Chief Felix A. Adenaike

THE octogenarian celebrant, Prince Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya, was the Editor of the 'Daily Times' when I joined the editorial staff of then Nigeria's biggest and most influential news paper in late 1971 after university. He was away on vacation touring Asia when I came on board and was, therefore, not part of the recruiting team. But on resuming work after his holiday and finding me on his staff, he was pleased, indeed.

Before joining the 'Daily Times' I had made an acquaintance of Prince Odukomaiya during my undergraduate days at the University of Lagos. He had been impressed by an article I had written in his newspaper on population control. He then asked through Femi Sonaike, my classmate and friend and a staffer of the '**Daily Times**' on study leave, that I should see him.

I paid the visit on a Saturday, which was the day he did his administrative chores. The meeting was businesslike and straight to the point: come and work for me on graduation. Job offer accepted. I thanked him and went back to campus. I did a few more pieces in the 'Daily Times' before graduation.

My job description on getting to the 'Daily Times' was as leader/feature writer. I, therefore, began writing editorials in the newspaper in my second week. As there was no editorial board at that time, the task of doing the draft editorials belonged in the Features Desk. Prince

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Odukamaiya preferred me doing the drafts to which he did little or no editing.

On a certain Sunday, I was down with malaria and was not going to go to work. The editor sent his car and driver to fetch me from home to his house at Ilupeju Estate, Lagos. On discovering that I was out of sorts, he inquired what the matter was. On learning it was fever, he offered me breakfast and medication. I told him I would throw up if I ate anything. He then dropped the bombshell. "Felix, you are coming with me to the office to do the editorial for tomorrow's paper". I wondered how hard a taskmaster he was giving my indisposition!

We arrived in his office and I sat opposite him at his desk. He gave me sheets of paper and asked me to do a draft editorial on a topic he suggested, which I did. On vetting it, he sent it for typesetting. He then sent for his driver to take me back home for the day.

As Editor, Prince Odukamaiya was on top of the job. He read his newspaper from cover to cover and nobody could insert a line in the paper without him discovering it! He edited articles mailed to him directly before passing them to the Features Desk for publication. He edited '**Letters to the Editor**' himself and selected the '**Star Letter**' of the day, which attracted prize money, for publication

.

Prince Odukamaiya was an all-rounder as editor. He was at home in news, sub-editing, headline casting, features, leader writing, production, etc. The lazy ones dived for cover anytime he went round the desks, which he did at least once a day, to keep staffers on their



toes. The small brown envelope delivered to your desk from the editor's desk meant commendation or a query. It was usually opened with trepidation.

To have passed through the skilled editorial hands of Prince Odukomaiya was a great privilege, which many and I had, but which many more never had! And it was not for fun that the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola invited him to found and run the Concord group as Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief and Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu years later, named him to run his Champion newspaper group in the twin capacities. There were many newspapermen around, but the prince stood head and shoulders above his peers and contemporaries.

This is wishing him more years in good health of mind and body. Amen.

- *Mr. Adenaike was later seconded to 'West Africa' Magazine in London as the first black journalist. He was London-based Europe correspondent of the 'Daily Times'. Years later, he became chief executive of the Sketch Group and editor-in-chief of the Tribune Group, both in Ibadan. He retired into book publishing in Ibadan in 1991.*

## To a journalist of distinction at 80

-----By Chief Sola Odunfa

I MET Mr. Henry Odukamaiya at the Daily Times of Nigeria Limited in 1966 and, within a short while, I learnt from him one of the cornerstones of the journalism profession: discipline.

He was a sub-editor - the position on which rested the timely and efficient production of a newspaper. It was a backroom position which was hardly known even to the most avid reader but which everyone in a newspaper office recognised as the artery of the production chain.

Mr. Odukamaiya was not just a sub-editor at the time, he was Chief Sub-Editor. He was therefore the determinant of the quality of the 'Daily Times' delivered to newsagents the morning of the day after he was on duty.

His sense of discipline started with punctuality. He arrived at his desk on time every day and plunged himself into work, pronto! While others would take nearly the first hour of their arrival to read the papers, Oga Henry was set for the day because he had read every newspaper available in Lagos before coming to work.

How he did it I did not understand, but I admired and respected him greatly for it. That value placed him heads above many of his contemporaries because we, their subordinates, recognised in it a heightened sense of responsibility we should emulate.

His attention to details was also legendary. He would not ignore even the Tit-Bits columns in other newspapers, and that afforded him a wealth of up- dated information with which he improved reports submitted to him for consideration for publication. Any report which scaled through his screening enriched the next day's newspaper.

As someone who had old-school education, Oga Henry was scrupulous about grammar, punctuation marks and composition. Of course, there was no way a slang word could survive in a news report which had passed through him. He was a stickler for the correct and proper use of the English language in the newspaper.

Those were the days of manual production in the Newsroom. Copies were typed, corrected by hand and re-typed before being sent for typesetting. Designing a page with appropriate pictures and catchy headlines was a laborious and tedious exercise. Oga Henry was a master in all.

His appointment as Editor of the 'Daily Times' did not surprise anyone. It was merited. Later he had the distinction of being invited from retirement to single-handedly design and establish two new national newspapers-the '**National Concord**' and the '**Daily Champion**'.

He did such a great job that the two remain successful and leading newspaper groups in Nigeria more than three decades after he created them. He could have no better testimonial.

I wish I knew him socially. At the Times in Kakawa, he would not join in

the after-work retreat to Can Can (across the road from the office) and other establishments where we did justice to the chefs' fares - Nigerian and Lebanese - and we shared gossips and jokes about Lagos high society. Well, he was Ijebu proper.

One theme I always chuckle whenever I remember it relates to the excitement at the annual Empire Day celebration in Ijebu in his primary school days. Pupils in all schools marched from their villages in well starched uniforms, singing specially-composed songs to the drums of their school bands, for several kilometres to salute the District Officer at the area headquarters.

I would give anything to hear this brand new 80-year old man sing one of the marching songs. Happy birthday, my dear Oga!

- *Chief Odunfa subsequently left the Daily Times of Nigeria Limited to become Editor of the 'Sunday Punch From there, he moved on to become the Nigeria Correspondent of the British Broadcasting Corporation for about 20 years before going into retirement about five years ago.*

## Analysing the subject as editor of the vibrant 'Daily Times'

-----Oyinlade Bonuola

ALHAJI Babatunde Jose called him simply Henry. We in the Newsroom called him editor. His avuncular presence, his magisterial carriage with a piercing gaze, coupled with his thorough knowledge of the industry, made the appellation apt and compelling. The word, editor connoted authority, journalistic skills, competence and effectiveness. Henry Odukomaiya was editor for only three years, but he cut the image of the legendary Charles Prestwich Scott (better known as C.P. Scott) who occupied the editorial suite of Manchester Guardian, now 'The Guardian' of Britain for 37 years. It is not just the authority of office they invoked that defined their identical mould, but shared editorial principles.

Mr. Scott is credited with the credo that is not only our trade compass, but law. It was he that said: "Comments are free, but facts are sacred." I cannot say on oath if Odukomaiya deliberately carved himself in the mould of C.P. Scott. But, in terms of editorial beliefs, these are so similar, there can be no running away from that conclusion. If I may take us a little through the world of Scott: It is said of his credo, "a newspaper's primary office is the gathering of news. At the peril of its soul, it must see that the supply is not tainted." It is not surprising, therefore, he gave the world of journalism the golden rule: "Comments are free, but facts are sacred."

On editorial comment, for him, “It is well to be frank, it is even better to be fair. A newspaper should have a soul of its own.” On the business side, a newspaper must make money for its sustenance and to have reserves. The belief of Mr. Scott was that the business side of a newspaper must be competent, but “if it becomes dominant the paper will face distressing consequences.”

In the difficult era of Odukomaiya, dictatorship was the order of the day in most developing countries, particularly African countries, and there was the ever-present danger of the service and existential pursuit of a newspaper being disrupted through closure or outright prohibition. It was a time the fear of Kam Salem’s boys, the ‘E’ branch, later called NSO, was the beginning of wisdom and editing a newspaper was a precarious enterprise, certainly not for the faint-hearted. It demanded a delicate balancing act. Indeed, in his first year as editor, 1969, the **‘Daily Times’** was closed down by the Gowon military administration. The chairman, Alhaji Babatunde Jose, his deputy, Mr. Laban Namme, Editor Odukomaiya and News Editor Segun Osoba were locked up and it took the intervention of Chief Anthony Enahoro, then Federal Commissioner (Minister) for Information and Jose’s one-time boss, to save the day.

Yet, Odukomaiya was not relenting in tilting the balance. He regarded the reader as the ultimate boss and that public interests must be served at all times. He subjected Gowon to a full stress of public scrutiny.

The editorial, advertisement and production departments are everywhere at one another’s throats. Each of these departments at the

DTN was headed by tough guys: Henry Odukamaiya for editorial and Demola Fashola, advert, Pius Ayan was head of production, but the lion was diminutive Dominic Nworji, whom Alhaji Jose simply called Dorn, but whom the rest of us on the sub-desk called the lion. When everything came to a head, there was no doubting where authority lay: Odukamaiya was trusted and his judgment hardly fell short.

The beauty of the 'Daily Times' was the unfettered freedom Alhaji Jose gave to his editors, having been editor himself, indeed having been everything, from compositor, lino operator, to reporter, from reporter to correspondent, to regional editor, to editor and from there upstairs as managing director. So, he was familiar with the nuances of every department and the idiosyncrasies of their men.

Yes, the commercial success of the paper was uppermost in Odukamaiya's heart; even then it was not infrequent when he cleared advertisement pages for news to the chagrin and discomfiture of Demola Fashola. The argument often was accepting to publish an advert was a contract. But the counter argument by the Editorial Department was to be published at the pleasure of the newspaper, according to terms and conditions of accepting the adverts. Consequently, whenever there were late adverts to catch the replated West-Lagos edition, Fashola dealt quietly more with Odukamaiya's assistants: Lai Mabinuori, deputy; Sola Oluwole, assistant editor or George Okoro, the chief sub-editor. Odukamaiya's management of human and material resources was geared towards making the newspaper fiercely independent, the most sought-after and a huge commercial success.

He cultivated the bright, the brave and the diligent, and pampered them - the Segun Osobas; Kunle Animashaun; Theo Ola; George Okoro; the Idowu Sobowales; Sola Odunfa; Gbolabo Ogunsanwo; Dipo Ajayi; Angus Okoli; Charles Igoh; Gabriel Oviogbodu; Chinaka Fynecountry; Femi Sonaike; Biodun Omosanya; Chike Ezimora; Felix Adenaike; Bisi Adebisi; Dupe Adeogun; Margaret Cole; Esbee, (Osuntolu), David Attah; Adio Saka; Femi Ogunleye; Bola Adedaja; Babson Adeyemi; Oladele Yusuf and Olu Akaraogun, alias 'Sonponna to mention just a few. He himself provided the leadership. In the admonition of Stafford Somerfield, editor of the 'News of the World': "Don't become a journalist unless you feel that you must and that nothing else will do. Even then, think twice. To reach the top, you must be dedicated, your work must come before home, family and everything else. No sensible girl would marry a reporter, or be one." For Henry Odukomaiya, his editorship came before his home. He would report for work at 7am and have a break after 2 o'clock editorial conference in his office, to return at 8 pm to read the proofs of his paper. He would leave at 11 pm, headed for home, unless something big was happening at the Island Club.

Mr. Odukomaiya believed that, to deepen and enrapture the reader, not only must there be intellectual, analytic rigour, but, equally important, language as the veritable tool. It would seem his role model in the purity of language was William Rees-Mog, editor of 'The Times' of London. Where to find mastery of language and creativity, in his reckoning, was the sub-desk. As gatekeepers for quality control and as custodians of the traditions and values of a newspaper, they must be queasy about unsubstantiated stories brought to their desk. What was intriguing was that Odukomaiya did not just take it for granted. He subjected the sub-



desk to frequent scrutiny, putting the sub-editors always on their toes. He embraced some of the practices of the 'Daily Mirror', the parent company of the 'Daily Times' until indigenisation of 1966, but steered the paper in the toga of the 'Daily Mail' of London which swings between the popular press and quality.

The industry tradition generally in the civilised world, particularly Britain, is, "Editors are heard, not seen." This was eloquently put by Lee Howard, former editor of the 'Daily Mirror' when he said: "I believe in the anonymity of editors. I think their papers should speak for them." The exception, of course, is if they have to participate in a radio or television programme. Odukamaiya kept rigidly to this code of conduct for editors. For him doing otherwise was tantamount to a gross abuse of privilege. The ultimate aim of the 'Daily Times', as Jose was later to reveal, was to raise the taste and tone of the paper and bring it into the assembly of quality press. Already, the editorials had assumed the character of a quality newspaper, appealing to reason and not emotions, and addressing decision makers whether in the public or private sectors, the church, the university, the arts and culture.

Even in news reporting, the trend was unmistakable. Yes, the writing was breezy and enchanting; it began to regard giving sordid details of a crime in stories as glamorisation and, as such, noisome. Rape could only be described as assault or an unlawful carnal knowledge. Slothfulness in writing was in itself a crime. He did not waste time when he expanded the newspaper's scope to cover business and economy as well as science with Margaret Cole as pioneer editor of the science pages.

A punctilious editor, Mr. Odukamaiya led the sub-desk frequently to a language laboratory. We were accustomed to bemoaning slothfulness in writing from the Newsroom but our editor would not take any such excuses. It was the sub-editors who must grapple with language structure and technicalities. He came charging one day to the sub-desk and poked the question into our face: Who is a teenager?

Hyphenation of phrasal verbs not intended as a noun attracted sanctions. So did non-hyphenation of “weekend”. There must be proper use of restrictive and unrestrictive elements. Take, for example, a sentence like this: The President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, is visiting Oyo tomorrow. Using comma to separate the appositive means the reader knows who the President is without mentioning him by name especially with the use of the definite article ‘the’ and we may as well not refer to him by his name. In other words, his name is not adding anything to the meaning of the sentence. That is unrestrictive element. Without comma, it means the name is essential to the meaning of the sentence, e.g. President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan is visiting Oyo tomorrow.

Some other phrases that could get Odukamaiya boiling are “owing to” and “due to”. When is either to be used? “Owing to” relates to verb. For example, The meeting was aborted owing to the absence of the chairman.’ “Due to” goes with noun. Due to the President’s visit, the airport road was closed to traffic for 30 minutes. Preposition should not come at the end of a sentence. For example, ‘the job he was paid for’ should read ‘the job for which he was paid’. What of what grammarians would call emphatic parenthesis? The latest book by Achebe - 250,000 copies are sold already—is generating an unhealthy ethnic

antagonism. When relative pronoun, 'who', should be 'whom', and when even as interrogative pronoun it should take the object 'whom'.

If Odukamaiya were an editor today, he would demand that sub-editors know the difference between vocative case and nominative case. A sentence that reads 'Mr. President is in town' would attract a query from him. 'Mr. President, Sir' is a vocative case because it is a form of address and it cannot be presented as a nominative case. After all, it is not a banquet hall gathering. The correct construction is 'The President is in town' and not 'Mr. President is in town'. 'The President is in town' is nominative case. 'Assure' is a transitive verb and so does not take the demonstrative adjective 'that'. It would be unacceptable to Odukamaiya to say: "The President assured that insecurity in the land would soon be overcome". The correct sentence should be: "The President assured Nigerians that insecurity in the land would soon be overcome".

In other words, 'assure' must take a direct object. 'As' is a conjunction and 'like' is a comparative. When do the auxiliary verbs, 'will' and 'shall' express mere futurity and when do they express command? Should our editor find mistakes whenever he went through the proofs, he would come with a scolding tongue: Who handled this page? Chief Ola, always earshot, would add petrol to simmering fire saying, "Awe, which schools did you people attend? Editor, you better send them to Tony Momoh's school for brushing up."

There was this acute consciousness on the part of our editor that students were reading the 'Daily Times' not only for information, but for

education which includes the correct use of English language. Much as he demanded backgrounding to news reports and analyses, using these as a smokescreen for editorialising was unacceptable. It was hard training and, I dare say, grooming, which is deserving of our unending gratitude. A few weeks back (early in 2014), Mr. Odukomaiya called to draw my attention to the wrong use of “forcefully” in place of “forcibly” in the **‘Guardian’**.

To Editor Odukomaiya, punctuality was the sole of business. Lateness to office or to beats was an infraction of company regulations. It was not only frowned upon, but it attracted punishment. Before you arrive in the office, a query is already waiting. I recall on the day of Murtala Muhammed coup, five of us had arrived in the office by 7am—Alhaji Jose, Henry Odukomaiya, Segun Osoba, Chief Theo Ola and myself. Osoba left us immediately and Jose had to share out assignments to us. Odukomaiya and I were to handle the first edition of the paper, with Chief Ola supplying stories. He himself mounted the typewriter to produce the **‘Evening Times’**. Odukomaiya had vacated the editor’s chair at that time, but he was already in the Newsroom to join in the production of the paper.

A highly informed fellow, he was in the custom of reading all the newspapers in the land before coming to the office and listening to the radio. It was always sobering to find during conversation that he had read an innocuous news item tucked away in one corner of a newspaper. If there was any misrepresentation of the report, he would correct you there and then. Our editor was held in awe: feared, yet respected. The supply of foreign papers, mainly major British

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newspapers such as '**London Times**', '**Daily Mirror**', '**The Guardian**', was often seen arriving in his office in the afternoon. This was certainly a glittering testimonial for our own Henry Odukamaiya, an editor par excellence.

Under the editorship of Mr. Odukamaiya, the '**Daily Times**' was a compelling read. He raised the paper to a new and enviable height, indisputably a huge commercial success. He made the paper to cater for the taste of the Establishment, the prime movers of our land, as well as the needs of those lonely or forgotten in the anonymity characteristic of big cities. The renowned television anchorman, Dan Rather, has said, "If a reporter reacts to all he sees, he will stay angry most of the time".

Odukamaiya was determined to give direction to a country in the throes of a civil war through fearless crusades for a new societal order in the face of great odds. It cannot be easily forgotten that through a special report by Gbolabo Ogunsanwo, an end was put to racketeering in the passport office. Chinaka Fynewcountry, Idowu Sobowale and Sola Odunfa were stars whose reports were eagerly awaited to lead the paper. And, of course, there comes Peter Obe with his exclusive action photographs. Star letters for which the authors were paid were a must read. He got the paper close to protecting Wole Soyinka in prison, arranging to obtain smuggled material about his health for publication. When the war was over, the paper introduced a re-union page through which families and friends as well as well wishers, separated in the years of hate, could find one another, and companies could trace their employees who had fled to the enclave at the beginning of hostilities.

Thus, the verity got proven once again that, in the words of Winston Churchill: "When things are not at their best, it is to journalists people turn for inspiration."

The '**Daily Times**' under Odukomaiya was opposed to the new transport policy of the government shifting from left- hand drive to right- hand drive so Nigeria's driving practice could be in consonance with what obtained in our neighbouring, Franco-phone countries, predicting ill- success for the policy.

The paper argued that the disaster the policy would unleash on Nigerians would outstrip its gains and morgues should be built in readiness for victims of likely accidents that would derive from the policy execution. This was despite the fact that the company's Managing Director/Chairman, Alhaji Jose, headed the commission to implement the policy. When the policy turned out to be an unqualified success, the paper was humble and courageous enough to admit that the government was right, but the paper had erred: her fears were unfounded. Prurient tendencies to which all young men of power and influence are heir were imaginatively and maturely managed and we lived as happy and jolly good fellows.

However, his brilliant career was blighted when, ironically and in a moment of unreason, he got involved in a rebellion against Alhaji Jose, our Chairman/Managing Director, paving the way for Murtala Muhammed, in a rage of rampaging vengefulness, to take over the newspaper upon becoming the head of the military junta that succeeded General Yakubu Gowon, thus terminating the legendary

newspaper wizard's career prematurely and setting the newspaper on a catastrophic journey from which she never recovered. This is not intended to be a depreciatory judgment, but to demonstrate that it is only a thin line that separates right from wrong and we cannot be too careful in our thinking and our actions. That the 'Daily Times' cannot be found leading the pack on newsstands must haunt with pain in quiet moments and in the closet that he shared in that calamitous error of judgment.

Daily Times was a flourishing empire, the largest and most successful newspaper in Africa south of the Sahara. Odukamaiya was a major building stone, but the Daily Times built him, too. He was a frontline beneficiary of the goodness of the magic kingdom the Daily Times was. In later years he apologised to Alhaji Jose. And he is always, till this day, the first to admit even publicly that he was in error. Alhaji Jose demonstratably accepted the apology. At the reception organised by Champion Newspapers Limited on the occasion of Mr. Odukamaiya's 70th birthday, Alhaji Jose was chairman and he spoke glowingly about his editor whom he described as great, highly competent and effective and that he did not need to supervise him for the years his editorship lasted. Odukamaiya's admission of the tragic mistake may be disarming, but this has done nothing to mitigate the damage and the lamentation of the public that has watched the worthy institution inexorably go down. That, in my view, is the only blot, albeit indelible, on a golden testimonial of a great leader, organised, gifted (an inimitable administrator and an extra-ordinary editor who knew what to say, when to say it, and how to say it through the instrumentality of editorials).

The Bureau of Public Enterprises, alias BPE, blew the opportunity to right the wrong when, during the privatisation of the newspaper, it ignored the interests of a group led by Dr. Yemi Ogunbiyi (backed through goodwill by Alhaji Jose) through lack of appreciation of sensibilities and ignorance of correlations and mechanisms that govern life.

I rejoice exceedingly with my editor, my mentor and my teacher on this auspicious occasion of his 80th birthday. Since he has retained the exclusive right to address me by my full name, so that his joy may be full, I do hereby sign this testimonial as fully described above.

- *Mr. Bonuola left 'Daily Times' and, in 1983, was appointed the pioneer Editor of 'The Guardian'.*



## A near-perfectionist, if ever there was one!

-----By Kunle S. Elegbede

I CROSSED over to Kakawa, base of the Daily Times, from Apongbon, home of rival Daily Express, in January, 1972 at the twilight of Prince Henry Odukomaiya's tenure as Editor of Nigeria's most widely read, most powerful and most influential newspaper of the time. The two were the only newspapers based on the Lagos Island, and the streets were synonymous with their titles.

The Sunday Times had obtained management approval to have its own sub-editor (Desk Editor) instead of relying on the one deployed from the Daily Times at the pleasure of the Editor, and could be withdrawn at his whim. The post was advertised. I applied and got the job.

Some of my colleagues on the Daily Express had warned me of "cut-throat politics and intrigues" at Kakawa. My response was that I had been through that, too, at Apongbon. I had witnessed a gang-up against an editor there. Most frightening was the unsavoury picture of "imperialism" painted against the person of the Editor of the **Daily Times**. I naively told them I would be working for **Sunday Times**.

True enough, it wasn't long when I came across the man, whose image loomed so large that it was fearfully felt at **Apongbon**. It followed the "baptism of fire" I had a week after my cross-over. The sub-editor who was holding fort was glad to see me. But for reasons best known to

him, all the feature pages for that week's issue of the Sunday Times were treated from home. The week flew and I thought all was well. Monday was our day-off. Tuesday came, he didn't show up. Wednesday came; he was nowhere to be found, and no word from him. No page had been sent to the Production Department. So, it was incumbent on me to take up the gauntlet.

Meanwhile, the Editor, Mr. Aremu Alabi, had inundated me with what he regarded as "man's inhumanity to man" in the organisation. He had been recruited from 'The Times' of London on the understanding that he would be the Editor of the Daily Times', but found himself on the Sunday Times chair after 10 months as Acting Editor of the Daily Times'. That was the only "induction" I had. Now, pointedly, he directed I should do the work for which I was employed.

Yes, I had appreciable experience in newspaper editing and design. But every newspaper has its own personality to express through its format, headline pattern and typography. I had no problem with editing and page planning. Neither was there much difficulty adjusting from a broadsheet to a tabloid. But one must know the font, the size, character and weight of types, most especially in Letterpress genre. Knowing the house style, too, is paramount. As I later discovered, Daily Times' had both the Editorial Handbook and a pamphlet on Type Faces. Neither was made available to me. I was in a quagmire.

So, I headed for the Newsroom upstairs ( ***Sunday Times'*** was on the first floor) to seek help from either Tunde Thompson or Lade Bonuola, both of whom had joined us in the production of the previous issue of the ***Sunday Times***. It was when I was with Tunde Thompson that I

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came face-to-face with Prince Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya, the Editor of the Daily Times', herein after referred to as **Oga**.

The Newsroom was, characteristically, bustling like a market place. Then, suddenly, there was utter silence, a pin-drop silence. The only sound was the clanging of manual typewriter by ESBEE (Tunde Oshuntolu, the Sports Editor) who was banging away with the index of his right fingers.

Then, I turned to the direction of the voice that literally shut down the boisterous Newsroom. It was a man with bracelets on the sleeves of his white shirt. He exuded such an awesome aura that was comparable only to that of the chairman, immortal Alhaji (Dr.) Ishmael Babatunde Jose. Tunde Thompson whispered: "That's the Editor." I watched him move from the Woman's Page Editor's Desk to the News Desk, where indefatigable Chief Theo Ola (the first non-Editor to be promoted to an executive grade) held sway. Then, he moved to the subdesk where I was the only one standing, and he asked me: "Who are you?" When I told him, he said: "Ok, you're the new man in **Sunday Times**." In trepidation, I nodded in affirmation. As he moved round the Newsroom, he had something to correct, from a bad **intro** of a story to a sloppy headline. By the time he moved to the Sports Desk, he had stamped his authority everywhere. I was amazed. I asked God to endow me with such wisdom and aura.

Meanwhile, Tunde Thompson later obliged me with some tips on types (body and headline types). Mr. (now Chief) Segun Osoba, then Assistant Editor, Sunday Times, also gave me some guide. But I must

confess that my first attempt at producing the Sunday Times was woeful. It was a disaster. Understandably, Mr. Aremu Alabi (the Editor) believed it was designed to pull him down: sabotage. It was on the following Tuesday that we learnt that my predecessor had actually gone on his annual vacation. But I benefitted immensely from the incident. By God's grace, the resultant effect propelled me beyond my wildest imagination.

The following week, in my quest to learn, and learn fast, I was at the Features Department when Oga stormed in, like a headmaster, waving a sheet of paper. I was sweating: cold sweat. When I couldn't stand what turned out to be a monologue, I sneaked out, wondering, like the disciples of Christ, what type of man is this?

The image he portrayed was that of a perfectionist: very hard to please. He never overlooked errors, no matter how minor. There and then, I told myself I had to buckle up to face challenges that might come if I eventually found myself working under him. I asked God for help.

Some years later, when I became the Night Editor of the ***Daily Times***, i came across the copy of a query Oga issued to Alhaji Lai Mabinuori for...wait for it...not hyphenating "**weekend**". I said, "O my gosh..., this man." True, it was against the house rules. In line with the Daily Times' House Style, it's "**Moslem**", not "**Muslim**"; it's "**judgment**", not "**judgement**"; it's "**body**", not "corpse". You dared not write "Mr", but "Mr." or say "the presiding High Court judge", etc. It's sacrilegious, so to speak. No wonder, Alhaji Mabinuori got a query for allowing "weekend" on the front page of the Daily Times But then, it's only a

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discerning editor, an editor who knows his onions, that would detect such an error. Some time ago, I asked myself what Oga would do if he were to find “**Obama sends an invite to Jonathan**” on the front page of the ***Daily Times***.?

Undoubtedly, Prince Henry Odukamaiya was versatile. He had a critical mind of a sub-editor; an analytical mind of a feature/leader writer, and the nose of a crack reporter. And to crown it all, he’s blessed with the essential tool of a good journalist, the mastery of the English Language. He was simply the editor of editors. No wonder, Alhaji Jose commended him highly for listening to his advice: that if he wanted to go far in the profession, “he should go through the mills, from a feature writer/leader writer to a staff reporter, etc”. Said Jose (in **Walking the Tight Rope**): “I admired Odukamaiya for his willingness to learn...”

Of course, the prince from Ibefun-Ijebu rose to become Deputy Chief Executive (Newspaper Division). And it must be said of him that he recognised diligence and never failed to reward it, even handsomely. He signed the letter of my confirmation as the substantive Chief Sub-Editor of the Daily Times in 1975, three years after I crossed over to Kakawa as a junior sub-editor, holding just a secondary school certificate.

Five years later, I got a message from Oga that I should see him urgently. It was on a Friday. The following day, I was at his Coker Road, Ilupeju, residence. Reason? He wanted me to join the great team he was putting together for the take-off of the National Concord. I told him I would think about it. But by Monday, a letter, dated January 8, 1980,

offering me the post of the Production Editor, was already waiting for me in the office. I turned down the offer outright, though I regarded it as a great honour.

Word got to the Publisher, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, who invited me for what turned out to be a marathon midnight session. Barely 24 hours after our interaction, I received another letter, dated January 31, 1980, containing a mouth-watering, hard-to-resist package. Though I also turned down that offer (a very, very tough decision), I looked back, went on my knees, thanking God for taking me to such a pedestal where I became a “bride” in the profession.

Obviously, Oga was following my progress. Seven years later when I was appointed Editor, Sunday Times, he sent me a somewhat cynical letter of congratulations, saying that if I had joined the Concord team, I would have moved higher, and much earlier than that. Maybe; maybe not. But then, apart from several courses in Britain and the US, I had already left the UNILAG and was heading for the UI for my master's degree which, to me, was much more than silver and gold. It was a dream come true, the dream he unknowingly inspired.

Happily enough, by the time I was chosen to serve under him as Secretary of the Daily Times Alumni Association, of which he is the Chairman, I had become a man. No cold sweat any longer, but not unmindful of whom he is: A PERFECTIONIST.

And, lo, Oga has not changed a bit in his approach to professional matters. God bless him!

■ *Mr. Elegbede, now deeply involved in local politics in Ogun State,*

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*was Editor of the now defunct 'Sunday Times' from 1987 to 1993.*

## A great editor and famous serial midwife of newspapers

-----By Pastor Gbolabo Ogunsanwo

PRINCE Henry Odukamaiya occupies a unique position in the history of contemporary Nigerian newspaper growth and development. Unfortunately, he is not adequately recognised, acknowledged and celebrated. Apart from being a remarkable and distinguished editor in his own right, a strict and uncompromising production genius, I do not know any other person beside him that has been responsible for the successful launching of two major national newspapers (viz the '**Concord**' and the **Champion**').

Prince Odukamaiya is not just a consummate and painstaking editor with great attention to details; he is a trainer and indeed a trainer of trainers. For many of us who trained under him either at the then DTN Training School where he worked as successor to an Australian, Mr. Les Riley, or on the job as Editor of the Daily Times', most of us young and old remember him for his "annoying" habit of getting to work regularly day in day out at the unholy hour of 7:30 am, when "normal" people were still expected to be in bed.

Before you got to work, Prince Odukamaiya would have gone through the page proofs of the following day's newspaper with a fine comb, sifting through every line, every phrase, every clause, looking out for grammatical, syntaxial errors, inappropriate headlines and subheads and for "smuggled" reports which people, (mostly politicians or those



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who were looking for social recognition) had somehow “looked after” reporters to ensure such un-newsworthy reports got into the paper.

Prince Odukamaiya would have ferreted all these smuggled reports out and “killed” them - even before they had a chance to get into the first edition. I was told he even looked into the advertisement pages (which strictly was none of his business). No reportorial crime could escape his eagle eyes.

He would have gone through all external and internal correspondence, writing out long “memos” to departmental heads. It wasn't until much later than I found out what he actually had a bed to sleep on, in his house!

I had met Prince Odukamaiya in 1965 after having finished my Higher School Certificate course. I was already working as an Ag Assistant Executive Officer (A.E.O) at the Ministry of External Affairs earning £39 16s 8d but, desperate to get into my dream profession of journalism, I was introduced to him by the then so- designated “Publisher” of the Times' newspapers, Mr. Jonathan Oluwole (now of blessed memory). I think on a fateful Sunday afternoon. Prince Odukamaiya who was then acting for Alhaji Alade Odunewu, explained to me that there was no vacancy in the editorial department of the Daily Times' but if I was willing to take it, there was a vacancy for a Library Clerk on £12: 15s (which was less than a third of my salary at the Ministry of External Affairs).

Believing that here was an opening, albeit a narrow one, I accepted it

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and had to pay the Federal Government a full month's salary of £39 16s 8d because I could not give the ministry one month's notice. Of course, my parents who desired that I should go straight to a university that had given me admission could not understand me, believing I was under the influence of household enemies and I needed urgent deliverance.

One thing led to another and I eventually crawled my way to the editorial department of the newspaper.

Throughout all these "wilderness years" Prince Odukomaiya was a huge encouragement to the "Omo Library" (as I was then derisively known) assuring me that I had not made a wrong decision.

But I was not the only one whose lives Prince Odukomaiya touched - Nicholas Kamalu, Wazee Ajibola, the inevitable Auntie Agbeke Ijaoba (who later became Mrs. Agbeke Ogunsanwo without bothering to pay to me a fee for lending her a surname through my great friend, now Professor Tubosun Ogunsanwo), Bayo Joseph, Kagu Damboa who later went to the Morning Post and became the first journalist to die in the Nigerian civil war, Kike Enyeanzu, Folasade Adewunmi (later Mrs. Folasade Oluwole), Sade Williams-to mention a few.

With the late Chief Theo Ola, the late Kunle Animashaun, the late Kayode Onabanjo, the late Mac Alabi, the late Ayo Adefolaju, the very alive and agile Sola Oluwole (now sojourning in the UK), the late Alade Odunewu, Bayo Rotibi, Peter (Pan) Enahoro, the dean of Nigerian newspaper columnists, all working under the overall inspiration of the

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“Lord Beaverbrook of Nigerian newspapers, Alhaji (Dr.) Ismail Babatunde Jose, Prince Odukomaiya produced first rate journalists who later in life gave a good and great account of themselves.

There is no greater testimony to his professional prowess than the reality that when both Chief M.K.O. Abiola and Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyawu wanted to set up newspapers, they could think of nobody else to entrust with the onerous responsibility of conceptualising to birthing their newspapers other than Prince Henry Odukomaiya.

■

*Gbolabo Ogunsanwo, now a pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, was once an Editor of now defunct ‘Sunday Times’ and a very flamboyant newspaper columnist*

So brutal, he did not mind stepping on  
your toes, even your legs!

----- By Dipo Ajayi

WHEN the now defunct Daily Times of Nigeria Limited began its “graduate scheme” in July 1968, Areoye Oyebola and I were the pioneer students of the Daily Times Training School, and Prince Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya was our trainer. I had just graduated from the University of Lagos (though I had joined the ‘Daily Times’ as a reporter in July 1964 before going to Akoka) but Chief Oyebola had been an established writer and author before he joined in 1968.

It was at the end of our one year training that the opportunity came for Prince Odukomaiya to be appointed the Editor of the ‘Daily Times’

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Mr. Odukomaiya was different things to different people (depending on when, where and at what stage you encountered him). Many people whose lives he touched knew him as a first class newspaper administrator. But I knew him as a first grade journalist and an editor of no mean repute. His success in all he did was due to the fact that, apart from his natural talent and gifts, he was always very passionate in whatever he set out to do; hence his thoroughness.

In journalism, Prince Odukomaiya was a man of many parts. He was at a time, a powerful feature writer and a strident leader writer. I can say authoritatively, however, that his best part as a journalist was as a sub-editor – or what was known at our time as “newspaper

engineering". He almost had no equal at the time in planning and designing beautiful front pages of the 'Daily Times'. People who took after him then were Tunde Oshuntolu (ESBEE). Charles Igoh, Sola Oluwole, Lade Bonuola and a few others.

Perhaps the greatest impact Prince Odukomaiya made at the Daily Times of Nigeria Limited was as Editor of the 'Daily Times'. He very quickly turned around the newspaper when he took over as the editor. There had been good editors before him, but Mr. Odukomaiya possessed a quality that set him apart; he was what some of us then called a "slave driver", but I call him a very good manager of men. The structure of the company at the time and the nature of journalism in Nigeria at the time made this quality of uttermost importance.

For example, there was a decent man of integrity and a first class journalist who was recruited from '**The Times**' of London to come home and edit the '**Daily Times**'. This man failed because he was a poor manager of men. He was so decent that he feared to tread on people's toes and the job suffered. He was in charge of the paper for over a year in an acting capacity but could not be confirmed.

In comparison, Prince Odukomaiya was "brutal" in stepping on your toes - and legs, if need be - but the job was done. The impact of this soon became obvious in the paper.

Another example of his thoroughness was when in 1971- 72 I was the Western State chief correspondent of the newspaper, based in Ibadan, but also covering the old Kwara State. Every morning, I would be

unable to eat breakfast until I had opened the morning mail that came with the day's paper from Lagos, to see what stories we had missed the previous day. Mr. Odukomaiya was sure to issue an appropriate query - asking us to explain why such a story was missed by the leading newspaper of the time. It was always the same with the chief correspondents in the East (Enugu) and the North (Kaduna). By this, everybody, both in Lagos and outside, was kept on their toes, to produce the best paper in Africa, South of the Sahara.

It is an irony of life that, exactly 45 years after Prince Odukomaiya became my trainer at the old Daily Times of Nigeria Limited, he handed over to me as Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of the Publications Committee of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral, Ikeja, in Lagos State.

He had been in that position for 16 years and on retirement in 2013, he recommended me to the church authorities, although I was not a member of the committee. When Pa Laban Namme, our former boss at the old Daily Times of Nigeria Limited, asked him why he had not brought me into the committee all the years, Mr. Odukomaiya said he believed I was avoiding him because of his old "bossy" nature. However, as I explained subsequently to Prince Odukomaiya, that was not so; it was simply that I just did not want to serve at the time. But whatever it was, there is no doubt that Prince Odukomaiya has packed more professionalism into his 80 years on earth than most of his peers.

I wish him many more years of service to God and to humanity.

## A chain of cycles opening, closing and opening again

----- By Femi Kusa

WHEN I was asked to write about Mr. Henry Odukamaiya, the first newspaper editor I ever met, I almost declined the invitation. I thought: what would diminutive me say about this journalism giant of my early years in the profession? I hardly knew this man whose fiery eyes I didn't dare steal a look at. He was in those days editor of the '**Daily Times**', I a trainee sub-editor. Between those two poles in a newspaper Newsroom is a huge gulf. It is as wide as that between a recruit in the Army and his general. It took me 17 long years of tortuous tutelage under many editors and back to the classroom in a university before I became editor of '**The Guardian**' newspaper in 1988!

I accepted the invitation, nevertheless, when I remembered that our relationship had grown beyond journalism. About 35 years after I met him. Mr. Odukamaiya became my patient with a severe back pain which may have ended in surgery. This was averted, and up till this day, he tells everyone I made him wear a suit for the first time in 20 years, a good side effect of his medication. Please note that I did not describe Mr. Odukamaiya as Editor of '**Daily Times**', as many people are likely to do, but as Editor of 'The Daily Times'.

Mr Odukamaiya hates sloppiness. Calling The **Daily Times** the 'The' is, to him unpardonable sloppiness. If my memory serves me right, I believe it was under his editorship that a lawyer arguing the brief of a man who sued the '**Daily Times**' for libel lost the case simply because

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he sued '***Daily Times*** and not the ***Daily Times***. For in law, Daily Times did not exist.

I told this story to Bukola Oshin, my shop keeper, when she declined to make food supplement deliveries to Mr. Odukomaiya at home some 15 years ago. It was a way of calming her agitated nerves after her first visit to him in my company when Mr. Odukomaiya exploded on her as he did to sloppy behaviour in those good, bygone days in the Daily Times Newsroom. She had given him an unsigned invoice. Mr Odukomaiya asked for her signature on it. She didn't have a pen. I didn't, either. Bukky asked him to lend her one.

Mr. Odukomaiya exploded, calling her an "illiterate" among other names. I, too, was tongue-whipped. He asked me if I didn't know that, as a journalist, I had to have a pen in my pocket always. Bukky tried to make excuses, such as that we hurried out of the shop to keep the appointment. He told her plainly she was an "idiot" for saying that. For, indeed, would a reporter tell his editor he missed the details of a report because he didn't have a pen? Bukky didn't know how meticulous this man was, a man who kept a file for every sheet of correspondence anyone sent to him, even if it was just *"wanted to see you in church yesterday, but you had left before I had time to"*.

No one had ever spoken to Bukky this way, and she would have nothing to do with him any more. But she softened up when I managed to persuade her that, as human beings striving for perfection, we were not to take in bad faith unpleasant experiences we may encounter in our relationships with people around us. Rather, it helps to search



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those experiences for the lessons in self-development they bring to us and we make good use of them.

Hadn't I, in fact, just written about 200 copy briefs for an upcoming newspaper and hadn't this question of seemingly responsible adults not carrying a pen on them one of those copy ideas? I hide my pen when I am in a bank hall, because practically half of the people there have no pens. These are people who have gone to either deposit money or to make withdrawals, both of which require documentation and signatures! They look for people to borrow a pen from, forget who the lenders are, the lenders, too, forget the borrowers, the lenders end up losing their pens while the borrowers become pen owners!

Bukky was to later discover in some Newsroom stories that I told her Mr. Odukamaiya hated sloppiness and not our persons. One of Mr. Odukamaiya's best friends told me one of these stories. This friend was Mr. Mac Alabi (now of blessed memory). His story was that Mr. Odukamaiya's sister was getting married and, of course, he was present at the ceremony. He drank a little too much and stayed there a little too long into the night. The following day, he missed the editor's editorial conference with the line editors.

After the meeting, Mr. Odukamaiya issued Mr. Alabi with a query. When Mr. Alabi arrived for work and was given the query, he went straight to the editor's office to ask his friend if he didn't remember they were together the previous evening at his sister's wedding party. Of course, Mr. Odukamaiya remembered. The point he was making with the query was that if he, the chief host, could get to the office the day after and

on time, why shouldn't anyone else, especially his best friend who should help his editorship succeed? I was later to see this Mr. Odukamaiya streak in Mr. Oyinlade Bonuola, as Editor of '**The Guardian**' and Nduka Irabor as News Editor of that newspaper. Bonuola gave Greg Obong-Oshotse, a cub reporter, an assignment. Greg came to 'The Guardian' with a first class honours bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Ife; he was easily one of the most intelligent reporters in the Newsroom and a voracious reader. It would appear his hands were filled with undischarged assignments, so he re-assigned Bonuola's assignment to one of his friends. Bonuola was furious when he saw the quality of the report.

This couldn't be Greg's work, he reasoned. And upon confirming so, he issued Greg with a query right away. Greg was to learn that editors assign responsibilities to reporters not frivolously but on account of abilities perceived in them. Wole Agunbiade and Niyi Obaremi, two versatile reporters of 'The Guardian' of those days learned the lessons from Nduka Irabor, the News Editor. Editorial work in '**The Guardian**' of the 1980s was herculean. It was not out of place to work 24 hours on, as the newspaper struggled to make its mark in the market.

Reporters like to cool off the heat of the "mad house", as the Newsroom is often called, with beer, but Bonuola was, and still is, a teetotaler. So beer had to be hidden under the table or filled into Coca-Cola bottle. Even television sets were not allowed into the Newsroom to prevent distraction. So, Agunbiade and Obaremi, like other reporters, went to cool off at a food kiosk in the next premises named after its owner, Mulika. Irabor joined them about 30 minutes after, paid for their meals

and bought them beer as well. He finished his meal and beer well ahead of them and returned to the Newsroom to issue them with queries for wasting valuable production time, as the paper headed towards its deadline for going to bed (that is, when printing must start). Mr. Odukomaiya was merely a typical journalist and meant well. He worried that Bukky was bright but not in the university. So, when she was set for the University of Ibadan and he got the news, he sent her some fabulous money for her upkeep. It will gladden his heart, I am sure, to learn that she graduated from youth service in February and would head straight into marriage in March.

I must have met Mr. Odukomaiya for the first time on March 7, 1971. That was the day I received my letter of employment as a trainee sub-editor from him, and I was to start work the following day. I had seen an advertisement for the position of trainee proof readers in the '**Daily Times**' and applied for one of the positions. But in the wisdom of the interviewers, I was re-examined several times over for trainee sub-editor. So, on March 8, 1971, I found myself on the sub-editors' desk with such people as Glad Anson Diri and Oyinlade Bonuola, who had been there one month before, and Tunde Thompson, who came on the same day as I.

There was no induction course for new employees. They just threw us at our trainers. Mr. George Okoro was Chief Sub-Editor. Mr. Sola Oluwole was an Assistant Editor. There were many senior sub editors. It was on the subeditors' desk I learned that the sub-editor was not the next in hierarchy to the editor. We commenced work at 2 pm and closed by about 10 pm or later. I always came in to find Mr. Odukomaiya in the

office. He liked to wear long sleeved shirts and arm bands. At about 4 pm or 5 pm, he would go home only to return by about 8 pm and stay behind after we had gone home. I always prayed never to become an editor if this was the life of editors, unknown to me that, one day, 17 years after, I would probably be married to the job more than I had seen him do. He had such an aura in the Newsroom that made every head bow in work when he stood there. Some people said he wore charms to command respect or induce fear of him from his subordinates. Till this day, who in Nigeria does not ascribe super naturalness to an *Ijebuman*?

The Newsroom is often a noisy place and called a “mad house”. But Odukomaiya’s presence always had a calming, if not sedative effect. I did not work directly with him and, a few months after, I was transferred to ‘Lagos Weekend’, the soft sell newspaper in the stable, to work with Mr. Segun Osoba, its editor. The tables moved soon after, and Mr. Osoba went to the ‘**Daily Times**’ title. I was to work later with such editors of the ‘**Lagos Weekend**’ as Sola Odunfa and, after him, Angus Okoli, Dipo Ajayi and Clement Okosun made the rounds. It was under Clement Okosun that I left for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1974. Thus I did not experience the political turbulence which overtook the ‘**Daily Times**’ with its take-over by the Murtala/Obasanjo Federal Military Government and restructured the editorial line-up. By the time I returned in 1978 after a year of national youth service, Prince Tony Momoh had become Editor of the ‘**Daily Times**’ Mr. Odukomaiya and I naturally lost touch.

It is amazing how human earthly paths cross and crisscross, how, just

when you assume the cycle of relationship has closed, it re-opens in another form, another garb. As I said earlier, I was a trainee sub-editor during Mr. Odukamaiya editorship of the '**Daily Times**', and thought it all over when I left for further studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I was to return to the newspaper four years after, by which time he had vacated the chair for someone else. I was to leave later for 'The Guardian', and he was to resurface as the founding Managing Director and Editor-in- Chief of Champion Newspapers Limited but our paths did not cross again in those years, professionally or otherwise. I was myself to leave **The Guardian** for '**The Comet**', while he was to leave the **Champion** on a second retirement. One day, my phone rang, and the caller called my surname in its full regalia as no one else does, except Bukola Oshin who took a bearing from this person whenever she called "Daddy Kusa". The caller was Mr. Odukamaiya. He was in pain and in hospital, he announced, asking with urgency as he is wont to do: "Can you be of help?"

"What's the matter, Sir?" I asked. There was no time for felicitations. He had a serious back problem, he said, and he thought he could help himself with aid from herbal medicine. I replied that I would 'try' but not while he was in a hospital. We agreed he would find a way to take his leave of his doctors, if only for a week-end for me to see him and make some suggestions. He agreed. I do not remember how it all happened. I just remembered that someone came to me in my office to say Mr. Odukamaiya was in the car outside. He was lying prostrate on the back seat. I prayed his would be a simple case. Such simple cases were those in which the colon was congested with the piles of poisonous fecal matter which was stretching muscles and nerves, displacing

organs and the spinal column to cause the pain. The abdomen could be distended presaging Syndrome X, a situation of metabolism disorder on which may sprout such conditions as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, elevated cholesterol level and ailments like that.

In such a condition, the ageing processes, fueled by a sprout of free radicals, would expand their capacity to hasten the body toward the closing of its cycle. If the condition was more complex than that, we could be talking of arthritis of the spinal bones or ankylosing spondylitis in which nutritional deficiencies, including that of magnesium or boron or silica, may have made calcium not to be easily absorbed by the bones, but to be deposited around them in a way that may cause a fusion of these bones. When this happens, mobility is lost, and nerves pinched by the calcification cry out in the pain felt by the sufferer. One way to easily imagine this condition is to visualise a candle in which the wax, as the candle burns, settles on the sides or fixes the candle to any object it is in contact with. Another lower back condition may be triggered by a slipped disc. In the herniated disc, hydraulic fluid spills on surrounding tissue, triggering infection, inflammation tissue degeneration and pain. There may also be lordosis, or curvature (inwards) of the lower back.

Happily, Mr. Odukamaiya did not seem to suffer from any of these serious conditions despite physical evidence of energy deficiency and wear and tear of rapidly advancing calendric age. His abdomen was well distended enough to force him to abandon his well-cut suits in the 30 years since our first meeting in 1971, and fill the wardrobes with

roomy native robes which hid the obtuseness. I suspected this was the root of the problem. And I must have been right on the mark. We spoke about his diet in particular. A man of his age, at that time about 65 years, was likely to have a deficiency of stomach acid. He was likely, also, to suffer from a deficiency of intrinsic factor, without which he would hardly be able to absorb Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. This could cause a type of anaemia and energy problem as B<sub>12</sub> is required for red blood cells which carry oxygen round the body. Oxygen burns food to produce energy.

Without enough energy, the cells would tire easily and their work which keeps us alive would be substandard.

Food would stay longer in the stomach and begin to rot. Peristaltic motion, that wavelike movement which drives food in the intestine to the anus for the digestion and absorption of nutrients and excretion of wastes would be sluggish. In that sluggishness, transit time of food from the mouth to the anus would exceed the healthy 18 hours. A pile up in the 20 or so feet long intestine would start to occur. This may set up pressure on the appendix and force it open, leading to dropping of fecal matter in it and the onset of appendicitis. Pressure on the anal veins may lead to internal piles, which may become externalised and bleed when fragile veins burst. In many men beset with this condition, food rot in the intestine encourage overgrowth of dangerous micro-organism, including candidaiasis which may weaken the colon and cause seepage of fecal matter on the prostate gland. It requires no stargazing to imagine that infection(s) may occur in the prostate gland, the Waterloo of many men, and cause inflammation, benign prostate

hyperplasia (BPH), which is a friendly enlargement, or outright prostate cancer.

I found that Mr. Odukamaiya ate little or nothing during the day and compensated his appetite with voluminous dinner. This often could be two or three wrappings of *fufu*. 'My goodness', I screamed, when he told me this had gone on for several years. Hadn't he read about Barbara Cartland, I wondered. Barbara was one of many health 'writers who helped our generation exhume dust, and popularise the knowledge of the Bio-rhythm. The biorhythm, in this case, is all about the daily schedules of our bodies. It is an eight-hour scheme of three schedules in the 24 hours into which the day is divided and it operates as follows:

- (1) **4 am to 12 noon** (for the elimination of wastes and poisons)
- (2) **12 noon to 8 p.m.** (for digestion), and
- (3) **8 p.m. to 4 a.m.** (for the absorption of nutrients from digested food)

By this reasoning, we are not to disturb the order of Mother Nature in respect of feeding habits if we wish to stay out of trouble. We run into trouble, for example, if we eat when we should be absorbing nutrients or eliminating wastes and poison. For the body may decide to perform both functions 'half and half or perform one 100 per cent and abandon the other or perform both in other discomfoting ratios. I can liken this physiological anomaly to a motorist who, at the same time, is trying to break the speed of his vehicle and trying to accelerate it. Mr. Odukamaiya ate his dinner late, in disrespect of the aforementioned biorhythm of the body. Who among us journalists doesn't, whatever the degree of violation? As a trainee sub-editor in the 1970s, I would leave



the office at about 10 pm and arrive home about an hour later. I would have dinner at about midnight irrespective of the fact that the sun was long down and there wasn't enough energy in the biosphere to maintain earth-life in high pitch. The chicken, goats, birds and even the plant in recognition of this would have long wound up their daily activities to make their bodies rest and recuperate for the flogging of the coming day. But, man, lord of the manor, in ignorance violates this law of nature about which he cannot do anything since he didn't create it himself.

Having advised Mr. Odukamaiya accordingly, I redesigned his dietary lifestyle to suit the bio-rhythm of the human body as defined by Barbara Cartland and others. I also gave him nutritional supplements to enhance the efficiency of the functions of his body.

Mr. Odukamaiya did so well on his prescription that, in a short while, the abdominal protrusion shrank significantly such that for the first time in 20 years, as he always said while sharing his experiences with his friends, he was able to wear his suits again, but before then, we had a near crisis. In Alternative Medicine, it is called ***the healing crisis***. It doesn't frighten the practitioner who has factored shock absorbers into a detoxification process. We are bringing out of the cells in a few days the poisons they had accumulated, sometimes for upwards of 20 years. In this regard, antioxidants (free radicals or toxins) scavengers and moppers, hepatics (liver protector and toners) and kidney cleaners are given along with the prescriptions. When Mr. Odukamaiya's healing crisis began, he became so ill that his memory dipped somewhat. To teach the healing crisis, I often give the example of

- (1) What happens on environmental sanitation day in Nigeria, the last Saturday of every month, when every household brings out its garbage for the garbage dispensers to clear. Imagine almost 80 million households leading waste into the streets. The garbage men are so overwhelmed with work that it takes them days to clear the rubbish. Before they do, the landscape looks rough, ugly and smells foul.
- (2) When the so-called pentecostal churches hold month-end functions on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway and millions of people troupe out there through an only route from Lagos, vehicular and human traffics stagnate for hours on end in this Nigerian financial and business capital. In the body, the toxin congest the system. The excretory organs work extra hours and, aided with food supplements and herbs, their job is soon well done.

When Mr. Odukomaiya's medical practitioner son abroad heard about what was happening to him, he ordered that one of his brothers in Lagos confiscate the herbal medicines he was taking. The younger Odukomaiya did, but Mr. Odukomaiya was not happy about this. He could not stop them. So he came back to me and refilled his medicine chest and soon he got much, much better, to the surprise of everyone who had known him some years before or who suddenly saw him in a suit and had to look at him a second time to be sure their vision was 20/20 active. So improved did Mr. Odukomaya's health become that his son who confiscated his medicines soon saw the advantages of Alternative Medicine.

This was where I had some problems with Mr. Odukomaiya. He was so child-like and so kind enough to tell them Ikurimisa was his doctor. He wanted me to see them all in their homes but this wasn't possible. At 63 this year, I am not a young man anymore, although reading and writing still make me work far into the night, in disobedience to the law of balance in work and rest, for which I have had to pay with strained vision. Mr. Odukomaiya would almost get angry if he learned I hadn't kept one or two appointments he lined up for me. I believe this is a weakness of many people who, despite their advancement in calendar years, are biologically younger than their ages, and, as such, are still on the go. They tend to believe younger people should be more energetic than they are. Even if I had the energy, did I have the means? He and many editors I worked with taught our generation of journalists to give ourselves completely to journalism. We were professionally puritanical and looked at the world of business with suspicion and disdain. It was only as retirement approached that some of us, if the opportunity of a career change came our way, began to see possibilities of exploring and working in other fields.

Mr. Odukomaiya can still be hot as an impatient editor when he lambasted Bukola Oshin for not having a pen in her bag, or when he rebuked me for not attending Alhaji Babatunde Jose's funeral, but he can also be so soft as a grandfather before his grandchildren when he lays himself completely at the mercy of his driver. We share different views about life, bated, no doubt, on the route on which each person travels to come to the recognition of the purpose of existence. I do not believe in funeral banquets and try not to be a participant in them. The same goes for some funeral services. I believe these events may make

the departing soul earth-bound the way they are now conducted. Can I not stay in the little corner of my room and send loving prayers for help for the departing one? I do not remember if it was Charles de Gaule who first pulled me by the ears over this question. When he passed away, his countrymen and women wanted to celebrate the passage, but they had to abide by his will. He had written that he wanted only his wife, children and priest at the ceremony. At 27, I signed my funeral will. No dining, wining, drumming or funeral uniform. Simply, a spiritual event for the help to detach from the physical body cast aside, if I hadn't done that, and go my way towards the luminous garden of paradise. Mr. Odukomaiya surely knows where I am coming from.

Regarding his soft side, I have only once experienced him, as the son of an Anglican choirmaster and organist (who was invited by the church his grand-father helped to found in 1893 in his hometown) to build a vicarage. He threw himself into it headlong, as I guess he does his assignments at Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral in Ikeja. He would take a huge sum of money from his bank in Lagos and travel with his driver to pay the masons, carpenters and their assistants. In my view, this is cumbersome and dangerous, but he trusted his driver well enough to expose the events to him. Then, one day, during one such pay-out, a car pulled up beside his own on the grounds of the uncompleted vicarage. Some young ruffians stormed out of it. To disorient everyone, I believe, they avoided the doors and leapt in through the windows, screaming "Where's the money?" They took away all the money and his car. He overcame the initial shock and adjusted himself remarkably to a life of commuting on motor-cycles. I recall reminding him that fire which burns the king's palace only helps

to beautify it. Soon, Mr. Odukamaiya bounced back in a more beautiful car, and with a bigger capacity, to discharge his responsibility towards the vicarage.

After this, he was gone again, I suspect, on holiday in the United States. But as our cycle of relationships has become one of opening and closing cycles, our paths crossed again when, about two months ago, he telephoned me about a book some of my professional colleagues were trying to put together for his 80th birthday. He was excited to learn that Bukky Oshin had married. He would like to meet her and her husband. All things being equal, I should be at the 80th birthday party of this man who became a tool in the hands of those unseen forces which help to shape our lives, who helped to give me the opportunity to become a journalist, the best profession for my needs on this earth.

- *In 1982 or thereabouts, Mr. Kusa left the Daily Times of Nigeria Pic to become part of the planning team under the leadership of Dr. Stanley Macebuh (now of blessed memory) which subsequently founded 'The Guardian', of which he became the second Editor in 1988. Now a practitioner of Alternative Medicine, he runs a weekly column in 'The Nation' newspaper.*

■

CHAPTER

3

*The Concord years*

1. *Mr Mikeoyinfa*
2. *Chief Duro Onabule*
3. *Sir Innocent Oparadike*
4. *Dr Mrs Doyinsola Aboaba - Abiola*
5. *Mr Lewis Obi*



*Chief M.K.O. Abiola (now of blessed memory), billionaire founder and Publisher of the Concord group of newspapers (now defunct) is seen (centre) with his friends, Chief Adeniran Ogunsanya (right, now of blessed memory) and retired General Theophilus Danjuma, a former Minister of Defence in the Olusegun Obasanjo military regime. It was at the first anniversary of the inauguration of the Concord group of newspapers at a party held at the Federal Palace Hotel, Victoria Island, Lagos.*



Odukomaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

*Prince Odukomaiya, foundation Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of the Concord group of newspapers, in a discussion with Mr. Labanji Bolaji (now of blessed memory) during the same anniversary of the inauguration of the Concord group. On Prince Odukomaiya's right is Dr. Doyinsola Aboaba (as she then was). Arriving for the big occasion was Chief Adeniran Ogunsanwo (right), then Commissioner for Education in Lagos State (now of blessed memory).*



## He gave me my first newspaper job

-----Mike Awoyinfa

THE man who gave me my first newspaper job is an avuncular, experienced newspaperman, then in his early forties, who turns 80 on July 10, 2014: Prince Henry Odukomaiya, a man who in his lifetime midwived two newspapers and even gave the two newspapers their names. First, it was Chief M.K.O. Abiola's **Concord**. Next was Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu's **Champion**.

And, just like Odukomaiya, I have, by the grace of God, been associated with the birth and nurturing of four newspapers: **Weekend Concord**, the **Sun**, the **Spectator** and lately **Entertainment Express**.

I feel very proud and highly honoured to be asked to pay tribute to this great newspaperman without whom I probably would not have reached the height I have reached today in journalism. Going back the memory lane, I vividly remember the year 1979 at the ITT office in Kaduna where I sat before a recruitment panel chaired by Prince Odukomaiya. On the panel were Alhaji Fola Ashiru (now of blessed memory) and two other men. They had flown all the way from Lagos in Chief Abiola's plane to recruit the best journalists in the land that money could buy.

I had left the University of Lagos in 1977 with a Second Class Upper Division degree in Mass Communications. After my NYSC where I served with the police in Jos, I was recruited by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) as a reporter in Jos. With the news agency, I learnt the basics of news reporting. But I wasn't fulfilled as a news agency

reporter. I came into journalism to make a name, to get a byline. But at NAN, nobody gave you a byline. Your story went to the general pool, into anonymity, covered by a general NAN byline. So when the opportunity to join a newspaper came my way, I jumped at it. More so, the hype that attended the coming of the **Concord** newspapers plus the star names paraded in their pre-launch radio and newspaper and TV advertisements, all of which made the adventure so enticing.

The very stars and columnists that I read about in the then '**Daily Times**' were all moving to the new **Concord** newspaper owned by the billionaire, Chief M.K.O. Abiola. The biggest star of them all, in my judgment, was Dele Giwa, the vibrant journalist who had been headhunted from the New York Times to come home and help build journalism in his fatherland. Mr. Giwa with his Parallax Snaps column had grown into a cult hero. He was one hell of a guy I enjoyed reading. He was my role model—the guy I wanted to be “like, my benchmark. I felt that if Dele Giwa was leaving the mighty '**Daily Times**' to join the new '**Concord**', then there must be something in the new newspaper worth looking at. That was my reason for applying for the post of a correspondent in the '**National Concord**'.

And luckily for me, I had a name that rang a bell. My uncle. Moses Dapo Awoyinfa, had worked as the Chief Press Secretary during the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon. At the interview, Mr. Odukomaiya and Alhaji Ashiru asked whether Moses Awoyinfa was my father and I said yes. In our culture, an uncle is also a father. From the look of satisfaction on the faces of my interviewers, I knew I had passed the interview. Even without having any such uncle, I believe I would still

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have passed the interview, with my basic qualification.

That was how I left the News Agency of Nigeria to become the Kaduna Correspondent of '**Concord**'. From Kaduna, I was discovered by my hero Dele Giwa who enjoyed the feature pieces I did for him to the point where he created a column for me called "**Reporter's Notebook**" in the '**Sunday Concord**' where he was the pioneer editor. **Reporter's Notebook** was an offbeat column where I reported on the lighter side of my encounters as a reporter in Kaduna. The rapport with Dele Giwa reached a point where I had to be transferred on promotion to Lagos to work directly under the celebrated editor.

Working with Giwa was an entirely new journalistic experience. For me, it was another "university of journalism" where I garnered enough skills and experience which were brought to bear when I became the pioneer editor of '**Weekend Concord**'. It's so sad that Dele Giwa did not live long enough to see his "grandchild": the 'Weekend Concord'. It is one paper he would have loved, because everything we learnt from him inspired the paper. Right from day one, '**Weekend Concord**' was an instant hit. It was a trailblazer.

From 1989 to 1999, I edited the paper for 10 years with Mr. Dimgba Igwe, another Dele Giwa protege, as my deputy. It was the best 10 years of our professional lives where we nurtured a generation of young newspapermen like Dele Momodu, Femi Adesina, Sola Oshunkeye, Chika Abanobi, Eric Osagie, even the former Minister of Sports, Mike Awoyinfa, Bolaji Abdullahi, and others who all later made their own marks in journalism as editors and managing directors.

I never had the opportunity to work closely with Mr. Odukomaiya but I know that he gave **'Concord'** a solid foundation that enabled the **'Concord'** plane to soar into a commercial and editorial success. He was able to implement Chief Abiola's vision to the letter. Abiola wanted an influential paper that would be the talk of the nation, a paper that would create a buzz, a paper that would break big stories and keep everyone on their toes, a paper that would create, in the words of Abiola, "conviviality, cordiality and congeniality" among Nigerians. It was this "3Cs" that inspired Odukomaiya to come up with the name **"National Concord"** for the newspaper which Abiola bought instantly.

I didn't know much of the details of what led to Odukomaiya's departure from **'Concord'**. But I know it has to do with family intrigues which culminated in the exit of the highly principled media hero. From **'Concord'**, he left to pioneer Chief Iwuanyanwu's **Champion**. And again, he proved that thunder could strike twice in the same place. In **Champion**, he championed journalistic excellence, taking the paper to greater heights. But then, the ugly spectre intrinsic in running another man's business reared its head again: A clash of interests between the consummate newspaper man, Odukomaiya, and the Publisher, Chief Iwuanyanwu. In the heady days of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election presumed to have been won by Abiola, Odukomaiya was asked to apologise for a story he approved for publication. A story about how the accounts of Nigeria's top echelon military officers were frozen in Europe and America, following the annulment of the June 12 election by the General Babangida-led government. The Publisher, Chief Iwuanyanwu, who was a

government contractor, tried to coerce Odukomaiya into apologising for carrying the story but he stood his ground. He was 60 when he left 'Champion' in 1994, after serving two three- year terms. Although his head was bloodied, he left like a true champion that he is, with his head unbowed.

At a point he was even tempted with an offer to return to his job, if only he would recant and say sorry. But he told his Publisher: "If the condition for me to come back is to withdraw my letter, then I would not come back. If I were that kind of person, you wouldn't have employed me in the first place. Let bygones be bygones. I have served you faithfully. I have enjoyed working while the matter was within the confines of you and me. Now it has gone beyond you and me, so let me stay in my house."

I am sure Prince Odukomaiya, at 80. is at peace with himself, having fought a good fight, run a good race and kept the faith. That is the crowning glory of a faithful newsman—keeping faith with the profession, rather than serving mammon. He is a man of unimpeachable integrity. I wish him continuing good health, more years on earth and a glorious crown above, when it is his turn to get there! That is the ultimate glory. Happy birthday, Sir!

- *After cutting his professional teeth while serving as one of brightest pioneer staffers of the now defunct Concord group of newspapers, Mr. Awoyinfa was appointed the pioneer Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of 'The SUN' daily newspaper which he developed into a roaring success within a space of five years.*

## The man and his pen

-----**Chief Duro Onabule**

MY hobby as a young man growing up in Lagos was reading of newspapers, one of which was the 'Daily Times'. That gave me the first opportunity of knowing about Prince Henry Odukomaiya who was a regular columnist as a radio/television critic focusing on the performance or non-performance of announcers and newscasters. For those of us taking Oral English as part of compulsory subjects especially in secondary schools, Prince Odukomaiya's column greatly assisted in phonetics, punctuation, synonyms and antonyms. Thereby, Prince Odukomaiya was one of those who inspired my interest in journalism as a life long career.

Privileged later in life to work as a struggler under him at the 'Daily Times' and more closely at management level at the Concord Group of Newspapers, I noticed in Prince Odukomaiya an incredible capacity for identifying competence or incompetence, with commensurate reward as appropriate. In that wise, he is a very strict disciplinarian who would not tolerate dereliction of duties. In furtherance of that standard, Prince Odukomaiya's strongest point was in crafting queries, such that the recipient would not only have a strong defence but must also be able to put his case convincingly to escape sanction.

A misjudgment which the recipient of the query could make was to read mischief into Prince Odukomaiya's action. Put in another way, nobody is ever comfortable with queries. Usually, the reaction in the Nigerian context is to ignore the points in dispute and stray into extraneous or

irrelevant matters. But the truth was that in issuing queries, Prince Odukomaiya had neither friends nor foes. You remained friends whether he issued query or not. While your response to the query might still be under consideration and, irrespective of the possible outcome, including suspension from duties if warranted, Prince Odukomaiya would still go out for drinks with his friends. Such a gesture was no guarantee against sanctions if necessary.

On the job, Prince Odukomaiya was a stickler for excellence especially on individual performances. You were sure your manuscript for editorial (leading article) was up to standard or acceptable only when it was published or Prince Odukomaiya did not edit it. That excellence included literally crossing the t's, dotting the i's, correct placement of commas or apostrophes and complete absence of any malapropism. Prince Odukomaiya would not be restrained by press deadline from tearing sub-standard manuscripts for editorials into pieces. Coming to Prince Odukomaiya's rescue at such urgent moments was one of my greatest joys while working under him. You would see his relief and appreciation on the following day. It was still in your own interest, even at such times, not to take him for granted as you must be on your toes all the time.

In obvious demonstration that the love of his life is the journalism profession, Prince Odukomaiya helped to establish two major newspapers in Nigeria: the Champion group of newspapers in 1988 and the now defunct Concord group of newspapers in 1980. How he combed the various parts of this vast country to recruit from the gatemen to the pioneer editors as well as the entire administrative staff

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on the two occasions remains a feat.

Beaming his searchlight over Nigeria for those purposes, the man exhibited his preference for the best without ethnic considerations, a very rare quality in those days and even now.

Prince Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya is indeed a great asset to Nigerian journalism. Here's wishing him continuing good health and many more years in the land of the living, on this occasion of his 80th birthday.

- *Chief Onabule, who was the pioneer Features Editor of 'National Concord', later rose to become the Editor of the newspaper before his ultimate appointment as the Chief Press Secretary to General Ibrahim Babangida, Nigeria's only military President.*



## A journalist par excellence!

-----By Sir Innocent Oparadike

IT was a chance meeting with Mr. Dele Giwa (now of blessed memory) that introduced me to the world of the inchoate Concord titles and the MD-designate, Mr. Henry Odukomaiya.

At that time in my professional life, I was the Imo State Editor of the News Agency of Nigeria, based in Owerri, the state capital. Dele Giwa was part of a team of Lagos journalists that the state government had invited to burnish its image. Within hours of meeting him, Mr. Giwa told me I was wasting myself in Owerri. Lagos, he said, was the place. He told me about the **Concord** where he was headed as editor-designate of the Sunday title.

I was persuaded and applied. So many others did. Mr Odukomaiya came up with a solution, a written test before an oral interview. The written test whittled down the number of applicants to a manageable level. It also gave the interviewers an insight into the capabilities of the applicants.

Thus, it was that even though I applied to be Imo State representative of the new newspaper, Mr. Odukomaiya told me he would only interview me for the Editorial Board in Lagos. In his words, “you area candidate for the Head Office.” I drove what! considered a hard bargain. I asked for a grade level 16 equivalent from level 10, furnished apartment, entertainment allowance and, of course, a car. I already had a personal and official car. He granted all.

Incidentally, one of my colleagues who learnt of my total package protested. He petitioned the managing director. His grounds: One, he had graduated from 'Great Ife' in 1971 and I from UNN in 1976. He was on grade level 12 at Radio Nigeria, I was on grade level 10 at the News Agency. Not one to mince words, Mr. Odukomaiya told him that Concord was not the civil service, that productivity took precedence over prior seniority and every pay package was personal to the individual concerned.

Two lessons I learnt from Mr. Odukomaiya: the written test complemented with oral interview and the personalisation of pay package according to individual ability, I applied liberally wherever possible when I became part of management, here and there.

Just the other day, Mr Odukomaya granted an interview where he disclosed to a newspaper that he did not finish his university degree programme on account of early high office and responsibilities at the venerable '**Daily Times**'. That came to me as a surprise. In all the years he was my boss at the Concord Newspapers, I imagined he had at least a master's degree. I am a loose writer. Each time he worked on my scripts, he tightened them and enhanced their readability without changing the meaning. Thank God, the road to a university degree for him was blocked. He was headed the wrong way, away from journalism. The guiding angel of journalism arrested him as he arrested his colleague at DTN, Chief Sam Amuka, in his quest for entry into a university.

Mr. Odukomaiya was, to the best of my recollection, a quintessential

journalist. No doubt about that at all. He loved that job. He made new entrants like us feel at home. Frankly, he made me feel special.

As a fine journalist, he was a broad minded, detribalised Nigerian. Every journalist with potential found in him a big brother and a friend rather than a boss. His body language suggested that if he had his way, he would kick out all the poor cousins the Publisher seeded the place with. In exasperation once I had to confront the large hearted Publisher why he had so many people on the payroll who were not earning their keep. Rather than get angry and tell me that it was not my business, he more or less said the alternative was to pay them from his purse. Understandable if they were given sinecures. Some held sensitive, key jobs and didn't have the good sense to answer the name and let others do the job.

As Managing Director, Mr. Odukamaiya was the "general overseer" of that new newspaper group. He gave priority to content, but, production, distribution, marketing and circulation were not neglected. From inception, he raided Daily Times, New Nigerian, Radio Nigeria, News Agency, Tribune for their best in these areas, priced them out of the market and gave them room to operate. That way had he wished, he could have gone to Ikoyi to play golf. Happily for journalism, the time on his hands was spent and well-spent sharpening content and the journalists that provided them.

Contrary to what people generally think and believe of journalists, Mr. Odukamaiya was deeply religious. Anything that would stop him going to Archbishop Vining Memorial Church, Ikeja, for a Sunday service

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would need to be life threatening.

But his stay at Concord House was unhappily brief. At his level, Concord in those days was close to a minefield, mined by contending interests wanting the Publisher in their corner, exclusively. For a while he cleverly sidestepped the mines. Later, he called it quits as it was no longer worth the effort.

Of course, you can't keep a good man down or out for too long. Chief Emmanuel Chukwuerneka Iwuanyanwu jumped at the chance to hire a man that had proved himself at Concord for his Champion newspapers. Oga Henry went with his team, and made a success of what was up to that time, an idea, albeit, a good one.

Soon after Mr. Odukomaiya left Concord, I left for my adventure in Kaduna, first, the 'Democrat', then the 'New Nigerian'. A later move by Mr. Odukomaiya to make me his deputy and understudy at Champion fell victim to intrigue. It was aborted. So I didn't have the rare privilege and honour of working with the journalism guru again. But the two EMMAS, the big **Emma**, employer; and small Emma, (Emma Agu, employee) spoke highly of Prince Odukomaiya. I believe them. Oga Henry is a good man, a good Nigerian and a damn good journalist. God bless him!

■ During the diminishing years of the Daily Times of Nigeria Pic.,

*Sir Innocent was appointed Managing Director of the moribund organisation.*

## Caught in the web of old and new media processes!

-----by Dr. Doyinsola Abiola

THE history of national newspapers in Nigeria is rightly written around the names of great editors and publishers with the glaring omission of the media managers who oversee the day to day running of the newspapers for profitability and sustainability. They also serve as a buffer between the motley, prickly group of journalists who not only want to print “all news fit to be printed” as the so-called Fourth Estate of the Realm and publishers wanting newspapers in their own image and protecting their other interests: economically, politically and socially.

Prince Odukomaiya was an editor before he became managing director and editor-in-chief of two newspapers (Concord Group of Newspapers and the Champion Newspaper Group). He came from the old media school having imbibed its dogma of meticulous editing, facts being sacred and journalists being a special breed of professionals distinct from all others. Not much in his past editorial experience prepared him for the beginning of new age journalism with PDF replacing the galley proof; editors acquiring celebrity status with more hype than professionalism in writing their weekly columns.

In fact, Prince Odukomaiya was caught in the transitional period of old and new media with predictable operational friction. He came from the tradition of ‘organised chaos’ of the newspaper organisations with the

all knowing editor-in-chief truly in charge, which he exemplified; one who has a solid grasp of his publication; who keeps track of multiple journalists working on multiple stories; a prudent copywriter who makes the journalist's copy better and he knows his newspaper's readership audience. As a result, he can explain why a pitch is or isn't a good fit, and if it is not, make suggestions for changes that would bring it on target. He follows through and shows appreciation for assignments well done.

With this mindset, Prince Odukamaiya supervised younger editors who believed the old media practitioners are stuck in tradition with their style manuals and beliefs in hierarchical editorial structures. As a veteran newspaper journalist, he tried to make them in his own image, so to speak, with consequent resentment from the new age colleagues who are searching for a new order to ensure their fiscal well being without a navigator/an editor-in-chief whose preoccupation was to ensure professionalism. Thus, the friction line was drawn but both sides missed the cardinal imperative for a conversation about the evolution of media in the Internet Age and what it would take to survive in the new environment. Times have indeed changed and this calls for strategic, operational changes, which are still lacking.

The new internet media with their vitality and velocity have brought greater diversity and view points to their consumers, even though such consumers tend to isolate their news consumption to only the views they want to hear. Furthermore, **Concord** demise is a glaring example of the myth that big media houses are more effective at standing up to big institutions like governments and corporations. In reality, they

cannot, for ultimately and after a good fight, we caved in because we were unable to withstand the authority and fiscal might of the Federal Government. That is a lesson that should be well taken by surviving media organisations.

Prince Odukamaiya practised his trade to the best of his professional abilities and was in tune with his time. The history of newspaper journalism in Nigeria will be incomplete without a mention of him who, through his professionalism, helped to expand daily journalism by being the founding editorial manager of two national newspapers. He could take pride in the fact that professionalism is still somewhat alive as the old and new media are converging for the better and the editorial process is shifting to the consumers of news.

I doff my hat to the prince at 80 and long live the prince!

- *Dr. Mrs. Hamidat Doyinsola Abiola is the first woman to occupy the position of editor of a national daily newspaper and subsequently also the first woman Managing Director/Editor-in- Chief of a media house in Nigeria.*

## Was he mean, stingy or simply destined not to appreciate my worth?

-----By Lewis Obi

MY first meeting with Prince Henry Odukamaiya was brief. I had been sent up by Mr. Dele Giwa, who was then the Features Editor of the Daily Times'. It began quite nicely. "Dele Giwa says you and he are one item?"

I shrugged and said nothing, not quite sure how to respond to a question like that. "So we're only to discuss your service conditions." I nodded, a bit relieved. When we finished, I took it that I was going to be paid N7.500 a year. This I gleefully announced to friends and colleagues.

A few days later, the letter of offer arrived. It said N6,500. A thousand Naira difference in 1980 was a big deal. Yet, it did not cross my mind to return to the table. First, I never learnt how to haggle; friends score me the undisputed worst bargainer. But, perhaps, even more crucial was that I had made a commitment to Mr. Giwa about the job in question.

He had told me how he'd been offered the editorship of a proposed Sunday newspaper and the only way he (Giwa) would accept it was if I agreed to go with him. I should take time to think about it, he said, because his taking the job depended on me. I replied at once that if he liked to take the job I would feel really honoured to come with him and



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that I did not need to think about it.

About three years later, Prince Odukomaiya called me. He was then no longer the Managing Director and Editor-in- Chief of the Concord Press of Nigeria Limited. He had called to say he was sorry for under-paying me. The reason, he explained, was that at the time (of our bargaining) he did not know me enough. He had thereafter been seeing my work from the outside and felt he owed me an apology.

At Prince Odukomaiya's frank and open expression of humility, I felt like I had won a Pulitzer.

Nor was that the end of my lack of luck with Prince Odukomaiya. He also hired me as the editor of the 'Daily Champion', after taking me through his usually uncompromising process. The deal breaker was that I asked for two units of room air conditioners for my living room and bed room.

I wish to confess that I once found myself pondering what I considered Prince Odukomaiya's reluctance to be generous. Was he just being mean or just 'bean counting?' His second choice editor eventually got the same air conditioners he denied me, he later admitted. So, all things considered, I could not decide he was a mean man. I think he was a newspaper man trying to run the store like a typical Jewish shopkeeper.

I do not know Prince Odukomaiya's family enough to judge if he was as stingy with family members as he was with his editors. My hunch is that he is likely to be about the same. Fleet Street barons of the past

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two generations, not excluding Murdoch, were almost all stingy men, no matter how rich.

Time's Henry Luce at the height of his wealth and power argued with his wife: how could he spend \$100,000 buying her a set of pearls when those worn by his secretary cost \$25 and only an expert would know the difference?

The prince may be stingy or not, yet I don't know any man dead or alive in Nigerian Press history who has been as successful in bringing new papers to life as Henry Odukamaiya. The Concord Group and the Champion Group are towering monuments to his superb instincts and skills.

The papers not only came alive, they thrived. At its height, the Concord Group was the biggest news publishing house in Africa before it became a victim of Nigeria's culture of wicked governance and tyranny. The ***Champion*** after roaring for many years, seems to be stalling, sliding a bit, owing to lack of diligent publishing.

When Prince Odukamaiya is in the boardroom, he conjures the feeling of a deep bench, to borrow soccer terminology. And the reason is obvious. He has seen it all. Editors can't fool him. He is a production expert. Above all, he has an eagle eye. He cares much for aesthetics as he does for substance. I remember once being upbraided for casting a headline he considered "optically strenuous." He devotes time, he reads the paper. The professional travails begin when he is gone.

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My heartiest congratulations to Prince Odukomaiya as he turns 80 today! Here's wishing him continuing good health and many more years in the land of the living!

CHAPTER

4

I

The Champion years

1. Mr. Dele Adeosun
2. Mr. Emma Agu

## An unforgettable encounter

-----By Dele Adeosun

THIS day in January, this year, the vestiges of dawn were gradually dovetailing into a lazy morning. The first ray of daylight was peeping into my bedroom through the thick window curtains.

Just then, my mobile telephone beeped, rousing me from sleep. I am ordinarily not a bad sleeper, but I had kept the vigil the previous day and, therefore, slept very late.

Still struggling to regain full consciousness, I grunted a dreary “Hello” into the handset, but the familiar voice on the other end, like a reflex action, nudged me into a quick, full alertness. It was that of Prince Henry Odukamaiya, a respected mentor and father figure

.

I breathlessly muttered apologies and we exchanged the usual father-son pleasantries and from the little discussion that followed, I was nudged into the reality that **Baba** would in a matter of months turn 80! “80?” I thought aloud.

**Baba**, like a colossus that he is, is akin to the proverbial elephant passing through a thick forest, the way you will describe it will depend on the side you see. The question is, whether I know him sufficiently enough to do an apt tribute.

As I brooded over what my contribution, (which I had volunteered to offer to commemorate his birthday) would be, Baba himself quite

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innocuously bailed me out of an obvious quandary when he told me point-blank that he didn't want a tribute but a down-to-earth testimonial.

A tribute, he argued quite modestly, is better done for a person after his exit, but a testimonial, in his perception, is done to show how the person has impacted his world. I could not agree more. So what I'm doing in this piece is simply to relate a dramatic encounter I had with Prince Odukamaiya and the impact that encounter has had on my professional career.

My meeting with him early in 1992, about four years after he had successfully birthed the then wave-making **Champion** newspapers, was quite fortuitous but very dramatic. I was then the Kwara State Correspondent of **Punch** newspapers. The paper (Punch) was sharing the same floor at No. 25, Murtala Muhammed Way, Morin, a two-storey building, with **Champion**. Champion's office then, however, stood out. It was well furnished, fully air-conditioned and the set of upholstered furniture was quite exquisite. At a point, my friend and then Champion Correspondent in Kwara, Augustine Bash Adamu (now of blessed memory), was moved to Benin City in Edo State. And shortly after, the paper advertised vacancies in some state offices, including that of Kwara. I applied immediately. I had intended to cross over to the Ilorin office of **Champion** owing largely to the coziness of the office!

On the day of the interview at Champion House, the headquarters of the paper in Ilesamaja, Isolo, in Lagos State, those of us (candidates) who survived the first stage (written test) were called in, in groups of four for the oral interview. When it was the turn of my group, Prince

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Odukomaiya, who headed the panel of interviewers, picked interest in me immediately.

“Mr. Adeosun,” he started, reading my resume before him and keeping his face as expressionless as possible, “you write quite well; is it because you had ‘2.1’ (Second Class Upper Division)?”

Not quite sure how best to handle the compliment, I merely muttered: “Thank you, Sir.”

His next statement quite unsettled me. “But you are too experienced to stay in Ilorin. I need you here at the headquarters!”

I should, perhaps, ordinarily have been elated at that offer, but it riled me a great deal. Why? I hated anything that related to Lagos then. I hated the unruliness, the dirtiness, the congestion: all!

So much was my dislike for Lagos that when Olalere Fagbola, a damn good reporter of bohemian traits, was moved from Ilorin office of Punch to Ibadan in September 1989,<sup>1</sup> voluntarily opted to replace him. It was such a relief for me to escape dingy Lagos, but here was this man ‘threatening’ to bring me back. No way!

However, I managed to keep myself in check. “No, Sir,” I returned respectfully, with a calmness I could only manage to fake. “I don’t want to come to Lagos. I prefer Ilorin,” I added.

“No, my friend. I need you at the headquarters here,” he persisted.

What is wrong with this man? I thought to myself silently, angrily.

“Sir, if you’re not considering me for Ilorin, I’m sorry, I’m not interested. I don’t want to come to Lagos,” I muttered, not sure if I had not incurred the man’s wrath with the curtness that crept into my voice.

Baba, of course, recognised the tone of finality and left me alone, or so I thought. But I soon knew better.

“Okay, good day,” he said, dismissing me.

I returned to Ilorin and forgot all about **Champion**. But about a month later, I received a letter in a **Champion** branded envelope. I quickly ripped it open, anxiety written all over me. The content surprised me. It offered me the position of an Assistant Features Editor to be attached to **Sunday Champion**.

However, it wasn’t the position that enchanted me. Incidentally, a few months back, **Punch’s** Features Editor then, Mr. Bola Bolawole, had visited Ilorin and persuaded me to return to Lagos on promotion as Assistant Features Editor, but I demurred. I liked it better in the quiet of the big village that Ilorin was then.

So, it wasn’t the designation that attracted me. It was the remuneration. The gross package offered me was triple my monthly salary then! So, I found my iron-cast rebellion against Lagos momentarily collapse like a tottering structure erected on quicksand. A few days later, I found myself assuming duties at Champion House at Ilesamaja, Isolo, in Lagos State, in a new phase of life I’m yet to recover from!



Then, the encounter that has kept me glued to Baba for 22 years now: A few days after I began there, I had gone on break and was returning to my desk when my path crossed that of Prince Odukamaiya, who was then the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of **Champion**, on the corridor.

Of course, I recognised him immediately as the ‘strong man’ who dribbled me at the interview about a month earlier. But thinking he wouldn’t be able to recognise me, I made to just pass by but Baba caught me. Lifting up his pair of spectacles gingerly with his fingers to reveal his penetrating eyes, and looking at me sideways beneath the pair of glasses, he called my name directly: “Mr. Adeosun!”

“Sir,” I replied breathlessly, startled that he could still recognise me! “Are you in Morin now?” he quipped, a smirk of obvious satisfaction playing on his lips?

“No, Sir,” I returned, befuddled. I was thoroughly amused. But how did he recognise me? The interview encounter was quite brief and it was well over a month after. I came out of that encounter with the resolve to work extra hard to measure up, because I knew the MD, picturing him as a no-nonsense boss, would be watching me. I couldn’t afford to let him down.

This was at the point where my journalism career began to take a meteoric swing and then began the father-son, mentor-minion relationship between Prince Odukamaiya and me. Even after he had to leave **Champion**, owing to the unfortunate after-effect of the June 12,

1993 conundrum, through to the abortive era of ***The Telegraph***, the third newspaper he was to have midwived, up to now, Baba, like the mother hen, chaperones its chicks, has continued to monitor my career.

He would call on the phone. He would admonish. He would scold in love, where necessary. He would create time to visit. He never lost contact.

Without any contradiction, he has been a divine instrument handy to keep me on the path of career stability and professional excellence, a restraining check on my career path. What will Baba say if he hears that I droop? That constant reminder has kept me focused.

Baba's agility and intellectual soundness, at an age when most of his peers had long gone senile, are uncanny. More than two decades after he had retired from active journalism administration, he still weaves his copies like a cloth. He still prepares his releases (he until recently handled the media relations/publications matters for his church, Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral, Ikeja, in Lagos State), dots his i's and crosses his t's with the adroitness of a production icon that he was.

All I can wish him on this epoch-making occasion of his 80th birthday, is continued length of days, good health and peace like a river.

Eighty gbosaaa to one of the finest minds journalism has produced in these climes!

■ *Mr. Adeosun, a former Editor of 'Sunday Punch', is currently the Editor of 'The Nation on Saturday'.*

## Seven queries in one day from a perfectionist

-----Emma Agu

MY first meeting with Prince Henry Odukomaiya gave me an insight into the man who has influenced the careers of generations of journalists and who, more than anyone else's mentoring, helped to define my journalism career. In July 1988, I had been invited for what was termed a 'discussion' by the panel that was head-hunting the foundation team for Champion Newspapers. The discussion was brisk and business-like. At some point in the discussion, the panel chairman, Chief Bob Ogbuagu, OON, had inquired if I had any question for the members.

"How much independence are you prepared to allow your editor?" I had asked. Odukomaiya who, throughout the meeting never took his eyes off me for longer than a minute, looked at me intently and, after about 120 seconds, replied: "As much as he is allowed within the broad editorial guidelines of the newspaper". "What if the editor steps out of line?" I pressed on. "That won't be a problem", he said, adding for emphasis: "We'll simply whip him back into line!"

I left the meeting convinced of two character traits of the man under whose leadership I was destined to work for another six years: he would be authoritative and focused. He did not disappoint me.

Baba, as he was fondly called by many, knew how to wield power. He believed that power could and indeed should be delegated; he

accepted devolution of powers. But certainly wouldn't relinquish or 'share' authority.

It was either he was in charge or no dice. And he had a good reason for his iron grip on authority.

As managing director and editor-in-chief, Baba was the ultimate media general, adroitly navigating the often complex relationship between professional purity and business success. Driven by a consuming passion for success, he led from the front thereby keeping everybody on their toes. He had many qualities that need pointing out here.

Among his several pluses, Baba lived the dictum that punctuality is the soul of business. Many a journalist was unsettled by his obsession for **punctuality**: apart from those on shift duties, Baba was usually the first to report for work and the last to go home. Even at that, he seldom slept as he maintained a time-table of when the office would call him in the night. That he pursued routinely until the newspaper left the press.

His surveillance was so total and immutable that not even illness could deter him. I remember that after a minor surgery for appendicectomy at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), defying orders from his doctors as well as entreaties from staff, he managed to direct affairs from his hospital bed. To those who are not familiar with Odukomaiya, this could be seen as an indication of lack of confidence in his colleagues. But that couldn't have been so. He simply had to be in charge and he took responsibility for everything: success or failure. He was not given to buck passing; he hated the blame game.

With Odukamaiya's uncompromising commitment to professional excellence, it is not surprising that many of the journalists, including the pioneer editor of the ***Daily Champion***, found themselves not just struggling to cope with him but oftentimes drew his ire. But this is not difficult to understand: here was a master (a former editor of the ***Daily Times***, former training manager with the DTN, a former deputy chief executive with the DTN; a pioneer managing director/editor-in-chief, Concord Newspapers Limited.) Contrast this with the rookies, many of whom could not boast of eight years of solid experience in journalism. Baba was a product of the finest traditions of journalism: truth, balance, elegance of language, promptness, ethical balance and patriotism. Not all of us possessed the talent, training or inclination to achieve those core values. I regret to observe that the situation has regressed almost beyond redemption; for, while the new generation could indeed be brighter, much of the pristine professional values that defined the cosmos of Odukamaiya's generation have been subjugated to pecuniary considerations and unbridled materialism.

Prince Odukamaiya had seen the trend and fought gallantly to preserve professional purity. Often, he was quite impatient with our performance. And take this from me: he could be very merciless with his queries. I ask his permission to recall one such occasion among many that we had misconstrued as high-handedness at the time. On this occasion, for some inexplicable reasons, the day's production had gone bizarre with the paper dotted by all sorts of errors. As soon as he got to the office, Baba started releasing an avalanche of queries. As I replied, the letters kept tumbling into my office. I was already fatigued by the fourth query when I saw the fifth. I quickly took off to his office to find out what

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was happening. On getting to his door, I almost passed out on realising that a seventh query was on the way! The rest is history.

I am convinced that those of us who persevered to the end have a good story to tell today. As I have often testified on other occasions, without denying the immense contributions of the pioneer board of the organisation headed by Chief Dr. Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu (MFR), we all owe the phenomenal growth of Champion Newspapers Limited, at the time, to Odukamaiya's sterling leadership qualities. He was the consummate media builder. First, he established a solid structure and spear-headed a recruitment policy that hinged on good education, professionalism, competence and diversity. Second, as stated earlier, he led by example, whether in benchmarking editorial standards or driving the business segment. Third, he demanded complete loyalty to the organisation.

It is one of those ironies of life that Baba's illustrious and dedicated service to Champion Newspapers Limited could not save him from a painful anti-climactic exit. Each time I ponder the circumstances of his exit, I am bound to conclude that, indeed, there is always a tide in the affairs of men. It also reminds us all of the dangers of military rule and the need to vigilantly and jealously guard our liberties.

But, come to think of it, Baba's manner of exit from the ***Daily Times*** of Nigeria Pic and ***Concord Press of Nigeria*** Limited was no different or less controversial. Could that have been his destiny? I felt fulfilled and eternally grateful to Chief (Dr.) Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu when, two years after Odukamaiya's exit, the ebullient Publisher and

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philanthropist hosted Odukamaiya and his wife to a well- attended farewell dinner at the Federal Palace Hotel in Victoria Island, Lagos, which had Prince Odukamaiya's mentor, multi-dimensional benefactor and employer, Alhaji (Dr) Ishmail Babatunde Jose, in attendance.

On this occasion of his 80th birthday, Baba can afford to look back with satisfaction that his life has been one hallmarked by sterling professional milestones and God's beneficence. I join him in thanking God, especially because he has been blessed with a happy home and good health. I want to thank, in particular, my younger brother, Biola Odukamaiya, special assistant to the Minister of Information, Mr. Labaran Maku (my former colleague at Champion Newspapers Limited) who, with Mallam A.B. Ahmed, Jonathan Ishaku and Nick Dazang, formed the bedrock of the formidable northern representation in the carefully structured ethno-diversity which the Champion management, under Odukamaiya, deployed to ignite a nation-wide media frenzy in the late 80s and early 90s.

That leads me to add that if you are in search of a detribalised media manager, even at 80, Odukamaiya remains your best bet. Does that surprise you? Wait a minute: If, at over 90, United States billionaire Warren Buffet is still working, I don't see why Baba can't. Even now, as the Nigerian nation, including the media, navigates the murky waters of particularistic nationalism, there is much to learn from Prince Odukamaiya's legacy.

Happy birthday, Baba!

■ *Mr. Agu, pioneer editor of the 'Daily Champion', later rose to become*

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*the fourth Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of the organisation. He is currently the Publisher/Chief Executive Officer of The Union Newspapers Limited, located at Ikeja GRA, in Lagos State.*





■ In these two photographs, Chief Iwuanyanwu is seen making very

- In these two photographs, Chief Iwuanyanwu is seen making very complimentary remarks about Prince Odukomaiya (left) at a “thank you” valedictory party held by Champion Newspapers Limited at the Federal Palace Hotel, Victoria Island, Lagos, in 1995, after his retirement from the company. Presiding at the party was Alhaji

Babatunde Jose, one of the greatest Nigerian journalists that ever lived. And the second picture, taken at the same occasion, the chief host is seen presenting a plaque to the guest of honour.



- Still at the same party, Alhaji Jose, centre in the top photograph above, chats with the guest of honour and Chief Durojaiye Onabule

(left) who had served as Chief Press Secretary to the only military President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria before “stepping aside” in 1994. And, in the second picture, also at the party, two former colleagues at the defunct DTN (Prince Odukomaiya and Sir Steve Omojafor (left), now the Chairman of the Board of Zenith Bank Pic) reminisce about “the good old days”.

Beginning of a new era



SHORTLY after his appointment by the Ven. S.S.O. Kunnuji as Chairman of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church's Publications Committee in 1997, the committee conducted an interview with the Primate, the Most Rev. Joseph Adetiloye, in his capacity as Bishop of the Diocese of Lagos. Seen next to Archbishop Adetiloye (left: now of blessed memory) is Prince Odukomaiya with two other members of his team: Mrs. Ijeoma Enekwa and Sir Charles Iheagwam.





After 16 years of leading the AVMCC Publications Committee, Prince Odukamaiya voluntarily gave up the position in February 2013. To mark the occasion, the committee, under the leadership of Mr. Folu Koyi, organised a valedictory party which was chaired by a prominent parishioner, Prof. Wale Omole, a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University (extreme right in the above photograph). The spiritual father of the day was the Rt. Rev. Dr. Babatunde Ogunbanwo, Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Ijebu South/West. The guest-of-honour and his wife make up the group.



I Prof. Omole (left above) is seen at the party seeking some clarification on a matter from Mr Koyi (stooping behind). Others in the picture are Mrs Comfort Ubosi, an eminent parishioner of the AVMCC, and Alhaji Garba Kankarfi, who was a guest representative of the Minister of Information, Mr Labaran Maku.



One of the eminent guests at the party, Prof Idowu Sobowale of Covenant University, Ota (2nd left), is seen here with Chief Eniolorunda Akinwande (2nd right), another leading AVMCC parishioner, and two other guest representatives of the Information Minister: Mrs Elizabeth Aina-Scott and Mr Roland Abiola Odukomaiya (right).

CHAPTER

5

I

## 16 amazing years of God's abundant grace and joy!

1. The Ven. Titus A. Abolaji
2. Mr. Olumide Ajomale
3. Mr. Emeka Izeze
4. Engr. Rufus S. Ogundana
5. Mrs. Jacinta Olusoga
6. Mrs. Joy Chinwokwu
7. Mr. Folu Koyi
8. Sir Patrice Akwara
9. Mr. Godwin Ofulue

## He serves man and God

-----**The Ven. Titus A. Abolaji**

IT is an honour and a privilege for me to pay this tribute to a very special person and father, Omoba Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya, as he clocks 80 years in the land of the living. I thank God for giving me the opportunity of knowing the prince and for him to have given me the privilege to write this tribute in his life time.

I came across Omoba Henry O. Odukomaiya during my course of ministerial duties as Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Ibefun. I arrived in Ibefun on August 12, 2005, while I came in contact with Papa Henry about a year later. Though I had heard about him in the church, but no one could assist me to get early access to him, not even his brother, Otunba Adeleke Odukomaiya who died in late 2010.<sup>1</sup> I had become interested in involving Omoba Henry O. Odukomaiya in the Ibefun church activities, even when I was yet to meet him. Information about his late father, Omoba Papa Nathaniel Odukomaiya, who was until his death a non stipendiary organist of Holy Trinity Church, Ibefun, aroused my interest.

Eventually, I met with Omoba Henry Odukomaiya at his Ilupeju residence in Lagos State. On that day, I told him my vision on how he could immortalise the name of his father who was the first Choirmaster & Organist of the church by building a five-bedroom bungalow as the Vicarage beside a new church building then under construction, which was being funded by another Lagos-based parishioner, Omoba Michael Babatunde Taiwo (MON) who incidentally was a childhood

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friend of Omoba Henry Odukomaiya.

Papa received my suggestion with great surprise but asked me to give him time to meditate over the matter for some weeks. His meditation took him about four weeks after which he announced that, with divine assistance, he was accepting the challenge.

Omoba Odukomaiya started this project in memory of his father and brought it to completion within 12 calendar months!

During the course of putting up the project, he was attacked by armed robbers while on the project site and his car, a new Ford Echospot SUV, was stolen away along with some money he had brought to pay the workers on the site. His strong faith guided his actions, words and strong determination in bringing the work to completion in less than four months after the robbery attack. He strove to be one of the best fathers, guardians and champions for others to emulate. Papa has touched many lives including the Church of God and myself with wonderful provisions. Omoba Henry Odukomaiya retired from his secular paid employment about 20 years ago and has since then devoted his time to church activities.

It is my prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ shall continue to guide, protect and provide for his needs throughout the remainder of his sojourn here on earth.

As the Lord ushers him into another phase of his life, we pray that He who has brought Prince Odukomaiya thus far will continue to bless him



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and his family who stood by him all these years of service and grant him all he will need spiritually and physically to serve the Lord at his old age.

- *The Ven. Abolaji, currently the head of Ala-Ijebu Anglican Archdeaconry, was, from 2005 to 2011, the Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Ibefun-Ijebu, in the Diocese of Ijebu South/West with headquarters in Odogbolu.*

## The quintessential professional and gentleman

-----Olumide Ajomale, FCA, AVMCC Warden

THE name, Prince Henry Odukomaiya means so many things to so many people within the fold of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral (AVMCC). I have, as an individual, known him as a newspaper administrator and lately a dedicated servant of God.

My first encounter with him was many years ago, on the pages of a newspaper. As a young boy I had a passion for reading newspapers and the '**Daily Times**' he edited was the newspaper to read. Some 20 years later I had the opportunity to meet him in person and many years later, work closely with him in church administration.

Many know Prince Odukomaiya from his exploits as a newsman and newspaper administrator but few know him for his service to God. Upon retirement, he found that he was “too young” to be idle as he still had all the vibrancy he could channel to God's work. As providence would have it, some time in 1997, he was appointed Chairman of the Publications Committee of the Vining Church, Ikeja, and he served in that capacity for 16 years, only recently relinquishing the position for “younger people”.

Under him, the church magazine ***The Link*** was rechristened, rebranded and refocused '***The AVMCC Christian Outlook***' thus becoming an enduring publication with all the trappings of a quality

periodical. The editorial content, language, layout and use of pictures ensured that each edition was sold out. The magazine, with every edition, turned in a surplus on sales, compared with cost. Although not conceived as a revenue generating venture, Prince Odukomaiya adopted a business approach to running the journal and ensured that the returns to the church's coffers were healthy.

Working closely with Prince Odukomaiya, I am indeed humbled by the traits he glaringly showed which tell me that his breed is fast diminishing. An absolute workaholic, a motivator, a dedicated and transparent person, an advocate of proper behaviour and a proud family man!

In observing Prince Odukomaiya as Chairman of the Publications Committee, at close range, in the last five years, he would chair editorial and production meetings and thereafter lock himself up in the Greater Chapter Room writing and editing scripts for production. He devoted so much time to the role that his successor, Mr. Dipo Ajayi, teasingly said: "I can't work at the pace of Oga Odukomaiya!" He was dedicated to the cause of seeing that every edition surpassed the achievement of the previous ones. Not content with production alone, as a good leader, he also took an active part in selling the magazine, because as he would put it, "the work is not done if no one buys". He, along with other members of the committee, would position themselves as "magazine vendors" and you wouldn't dare walk past them without the urge to buy a copy of the current edition of 'The AVMCC Christian Outlook'<sup>1</sup>!

Every month, the Publications Committee receives a float for its activities. With Papa Odukomaiya at the helm of affairs, one was assured that every kobo collected would be accounted for via a lengthy memo that detailed how much every item cost and what such an item was used for. That was one committee of the cathedral that constantly ensured its financial activities were transparently reported. I should not fail to point out that when the floats were not replenished on time, Papa would always express his displeasure to my colleague or me for slowing down the pace of the committee's work!!

People of Papa's generation are sticklers for proper behaviour and I noted that you couldn't approach him or deal with him in an indecorous manner. He would put you in your place. You always had to be at your best in behaviour. Once, he threw a challenge at me for a seeming infraction by my society and he was so upset. He didn't understand why we failed to issue a receipt in acknowledgement of payment for a business transaction. When the receipts were subsequently offered, he diligently studied them and pointed out that the numbers for the ones he got were too close, suggesting that only a few people collected receipts for transactions carried out in the church's cyber cafe. His admonition was "Olumide, I expect you, as a chartered accountant, to provide advice to your respected society, Fountain of Hope, to do things properly. It is inconceivable that Fountain of Hope runs an outfit that collects money from the public and doesn't provide receipts". I would be lying to say that Papa's remarks didn't hit me below the belt! That's the iconic Prince Odukomaiya.

As a proud father, he pays, annually, the church dues of his children,

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most of whom no longer attend AVMCC. He has ensured that it remains the family church. Prince Odukomaiya has made his mark in life and has become a source of inspiration to many, especially within the AVMCC family. His tireless work for the Lord is not only noted by men, but, hopefully, by God Himself.

At 80, the person we celebrate is a gentleman, a professional, a proud family man who has served God with his treasures, talent, time and honour. As they say, 'retired but not tired', so it is my prayer that he will continue to enjoy good health in retirement as well as God's blessings and favours at all times.

## A veritable mentor

-----Eluem Emeka Izeze

SOME people measure success by the amount of material and financial wealth they have accumulated over time. Others equate success with the high position they occupied, the fame they acquired, the influence they wielded, and the respect others accorded them.

But, surely, success must mean much more than all this. It must have accomplished things more enduring than transient power and ephemeral riches. It should mould lives, impart values and monitor and promote virtuous conducts. Success should be a tool for managing today, and conditioning tomorrow for better achievement.

As I look at Mr. Henry Odukamaiya, I do not see a man given to lavish display of affluence, although he could have done just that. Nor do I see a man eager to leverage his wide network of friends and contacts and proteges. Rather, I see something that is not very common any more in our land. I see a willingness to develop others, even those with whom he does not share any known prior affinity. Mr. Odukamaiya is an accomplished journalist, a competent editor and an astute manager of men and materials. With such attributes, it is not surprising to see that he is, in retirement, more active than many in service.

I did not work with him in the many newspapers that he ran; I came into the profession as he was preparing his exit. But in him, I have found a mentor. His eyes for details, his insistence on good reporting and good writing, his recommendation for elegance in journalism, his visceral

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judgment on bad behaviour and misconduct: all put him in a class of a breed of gentlemen of the press that is now fast disappearing.

He will meticulously mark published stories to point out how the newspaper's sub-editors could have handled them better, in an enriching and improved way.

He would painstakingly outline what a reporter should have done to make a published story better, and indeed transform it into a brilliant copy. Sometimes, he would write or get on the phone, to express his pleasure or displeasure over the treatment of stories in a newspaper. At other times, he would write to say a simple thank you for reporting and publishing a story on an event that he held dear.

Such humbling selflessness, and deep desire to improve others, such courtesy and commendation for doing something right, are now a rarity in our society.

Mr. Odukamaiya's commitment to good journalism on the one hand, and good behaviour on the other, are at once infectious and ennobling. He became a father to many who have never seen his face. His name commands so much authority before those modern journalists keen on learning a thing or two on how to excel in this very arduous profession.

Even at 80, Mr. Odukamaiya probably tended to forget that he was no longer running a newsroom. Or he really missed the running adrenaline when a big story breaks, or when just lounging around in a newspaper house, where so much bloated ego and over-sized self appraisal are

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loudly advertised.

He spoke often in a stern tone about those whose conduct he did not appreciate. Yet, he held nothing against them, for soon enough, he was again on the phone with tips for excellence on the job.

I do not know what those who worked directly with him make of their tenure. But I know how much help he has been to us who did not work with him, but whom he freely adopted as professional proteges, and sought to help to turn out better products.

I wish him many more years of good health, strength and vigour, not just for selfish reasons, but because our society is better served with a man like him looking over your shoulders.

Many happy returns, Sir!

■ *Mr. Izeze is Managing Director of Guardian Newspapers Limited, Lagos.*



## What gives him the right to lead?

-----By Engr. Rufus S. Ogundana

PRINCE Henry Odukamaiya is from a royal family and has succeeded immensely as a journalist and managing director of some media houses. But what really gives the prince the right to lead others?

- (1) He lets go of his ego. He is not in leadership for his own personal gain. He leads in order to serve other people. Show me a man who cannot bother to do little things and I will show you a man who cannot be trusted to do big things. He headed the Publications Committee of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral, Ikeja, as managing editor for 16 years during which he devoted many hours of the day to doing the job that he earned nothing from, other than the joy of building people up.
- (2) He builds positive relationships. Leadership is influence and relational. Title and position mean nothing to him. Excellent output is his criterion and this is why as editor of the most influential newspaper of his time, the '**Daily Times**', as managing director of the Concord Press and the Champion Group of Newspapers, he left an indelible foot print that outlived those organisations.
- (3) He works with excellence: No one respects and follows mediocrity. Prince Odukamaiya gives his all to all he does. He brings into play not only his skills and talents but also great

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passion and hard work. He performs at the highest level of which he is capable.

(4) He helped several people to live better lives and reach their potential.

(5) He has always been a river and not a reservoir. He delights in sharing whatever power he has and not saving it.

(6) He is a man of courage. He is very bold and blunt in defence of truth and whatever he believes in.

(7) At 80, Prince Odukamaiya has lived a fulfilled life and deserves our heartiest congratulations.

## A non-believer in democracy at the workplace!

-----By Jacinta Olusoga

I HAVE known Prince Henry Odukamaiya for about 20 years, but more intimately in the last 12 to 15 years or so, when I worked with him as a member of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral Publications Committee, a committee on which he served for 16 years as chairman. In that position, Prince Odukamaiya had the onerous responsibility of picking his team. I do not know why he chose to approach me to join him to serve on the committee. However, I do know that though I am not a journalist, God has endowed me with some ability to write and so I acceded to the request.

Prince Odukamaiya is, in age, at least about six years older than the next oldest member of the committee and so this was already intimidating to many of the members. He was no doubt conscious of this privileged position, being an elderly man and indeed the chairman of the committee; he used this advantage to drive the committee. No one dared him. The Publications Committee appeared to be his life, as indeed I believe that journalism is his life. I often wonder how he is coping now that he has retired from serving on the committee!

Every member of the Publications Committee stood in awe of Prince Odukamaiya and was afraid to upset him. When he was upset with any member, he would not mince words to express his feelings.

Initially, I perceived him as a stubborn, arrogant old man, but as the years went by, and I got to understand him better, I started to enjoy working with him and to appreciate that behind the stern disposition, was a man who would listen to reason. If Prince Odukomaiya had a view and someone else came up with a superior argument, he would readily accept and was willing to experiment on the superior view.

One thing the prince was not, was a democrat. He was more autocratic in his leadership style. It was this style that probably made it possible for the Publications Committee to attain its present height. In our present day disposition where many people are laid back, perhaps, the autocratic leadership style was appropriate, considering the fact that timeliness of outing of publications was crucial.

Prince Odukomaiya is a man who believes that one must be diligent in service and as such he is not a man to condone lack of productivity. When a person is hardworking and productive, Prince Odukomaiya would encourage such a person. But woe betide that person, if for once, he were to act out of character and let him down. Restoration of that person to the good books of Prince Odukomaiya would take a while; such a person had to purge himself to be acceptable once again. A stickler for excellence, he abhors laziness and would not touch a lazy person with a pole.

I have seen Prince Odukomaiya mellow in hardness over the years as members of the Publications Committee continued to remind him that the committee is a voluntary service-oriented group and, therefore, the members should not be treated as if they were salaried employees who

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must be expected to dutifully render their services.

Prince Odukomaiya's view, and one which I share, is that whatever one does should be well done, whether for money or for the love of service to God. Indeed, service to God, which attracts eternal reward ought to be handled even more dutifully and diligently than service offered for the temporal earthly reward of money.

Here is a man who loves proper documentation of events, understandably so by virtue of his profession and his commitment to that profession. As a result he is a prolific letter writer. His penchant for documentation has made him an enemy of many who believe that it exposes them, more so that Prince Odukomaiya is one who would pay attention to the minute details and would document every bit of it in his letters. More upsetting was the fact that he would copy the letters to many persons associated with the event or issue!

Prince Odukomaiya has apparently affected many lives in the Nigerian Press industry; hence, he is still very much respected in that industry, even after he had left the centre of the scene for more than two decades.

I thank God for the spiritual life of Prince Odukomaiya which I believe is getting better by the day. He is transparent about his life and always felt free to sometimes speak to me about his worries. Although he appears to be stern in his disposition, beneath that stern outward disposition is a loving, appreciative human heart in which Christ is still working.

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We actually miss him on the Publications Committee which he left strong and flourishing. I do not envy his successor who has a big shoe to fill.

- *Mrs. Olusoga, a retired Permanent Secretary with the Lagos State civil service, is currently a theologian and frequent preacher at the Chapel of Saint Luke the Physician, located within the premises of Lagos State University College of Medicine, Ikeja, GRA.*

## A near-perfectionist, brutally frank, mentally alert!

..... By Joy Chinwokwu

I GAVE you a note to Mr. Eluemunor Izeze of 'The Guardian' and you did not have the courtesy to report back to me. I expected you to come to give me a feedback..."

Prince Henry Odukomaiya was reprimanding a young man for apparently behaving below his expectations. He took about five valuable minutes to explain to him why courtesy demanded such a feedback and how unhappy he was at such poor manners. He made sure he drove home his point, never minding that the young man remorsefully interjected in between with apologies.

When he was done, he painstakingly listened to the man apologise heartily, while proceeding to give the belated feedback. He nodded his acceptance of the apology. It was clear he totally forgave; because he proceeded to offer him more help, guiding him on how to follow up to achieve his quests-still reminding him of the need to feed him back after seeing Mr. Eluemunor Izeze.

Two things struck me as I sat watching. First, I got to know (for the first time) the full names of the famous Eluem Izeze. Eluem is short form for Eluemunor! And I wondered how many people knew that! Maybe not a big deal, but it is one of the many assets of the clear-headed Prince Henry Odukomaiya, not just as it concerns accurately relating to people by their CORRECT names, but generally as it concerns facts of history.

Tribe or language is usually an excuse for Nigerians to bastardise people's names. But here was a Yoruba man, lucidly and effortlessly pronouncing an Igbo name. It is about being thorough; about having the right attitude to doing things right, irrespective of real or imagined limitations. You would be sure to count on him to confirm grey areas of Nigerian history or even the correct use of words. In a way, he is an encyclopaedia of sorts.

Thankfully, age is not about to diminish this clearheadedness. It is a blessing only God can bestow. He is the kind that, if the Lord tarries, the word 'amnesia' would unlikely ever feature in his health dictionary. Not even at 100. Prince Henry Odukamaiya is a man blessed with a sound mind. I think he recognises and appreciates this gift of God. I once shared my thoughts on this. He does thank God profoundly for it.

But this is actually beyond having a sound mind. It is about being imbued with finesse. Henry Odukamaiya is a man with poise and grace; a perfectionist, if ever there was one! It is a gift. Maybe natural; or it may have been acquired. I don't know. All I know is that as little as this may appear, the ability to rightly or correctly relate to people by their names (especially on first name basis) is not commonplace. Not in this clime. It is English. It is sophistication. It is classy.

Prince Odukamaiya sees me and he asks: 'How is Godfrey?' He doesn't say: 'How is your husband?' That's what many would ask. Some will even say. 'How's our daddy?' And this is not about me. He does this with as many people as he associates closely with.



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When he was Chairman of the Editorial Board of the '**AVMCC Christian Outlook**', where I worked closely with him, he didn't overlook such lapses, especially when it is part of the editorial content. (To think that as I write this, I am so conscious of the fact that I subject myself to his scrutiny of my use of English!) Knowing the correct name is not enough. The orderliness is essential.

Someone once wrote a story on the former Dean of Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral (AVMCC) and referred to him as the Ven. Olusola Odedeji. That may be true. But that is definitely not correct. Not by Prince Odukamaiya's standards. He drives home his point, I must add, with love. He wants to make sure you learn this for your own good. The revered man of God refers to himself as James Olusola Odedeji. So why won't you accord him that preference? Please note the order of arrangement. He is, first and foremost, James. Olusola is (only) a middle name, not the first. Some people prefer to bear their baptismal names and that should be respected. I am still quoting Prince Odukamaiya please! He gives himself as an example. "For instance, I am Henry and I like to be addressed as such, not by my vernacular name." So much for names - and the point must not be lost! Prince Henry Odukamaiya is a perfectionist. Everything, no matter how little, must be done according to how it should be.

He is an inspiration - that is, if you get the point. Truth is you may not get it. He tells you off without looking at your face, without mincing words. He comes hard and unapologetic. Sorry, if you feel offended. Or go bemoaning your fate - perhaps thinking he hates you, or he will 'repent'. He is not going to care or bother about you. It means little to

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him. And you are the loser, anyway. His corrections are in love, or if you prefer, simply professional... and to the point. No beating about the bush!

Nevertheless, I never had the opportunity to work with him (not to even know him closely) while he reigned as a media guru. The closest I got to knowing him was while I worked in a bank in the mid-nineties. I met his second son, Tayo, who proudly mentioned, in the course of our discussion, that he is son to Prince Henry Odukomaiya. I could tell he was proud to have a dad with great reputation. I got to appreciate this even more when I eventually had the privilege of working and relating with the father himself.

In fact, I got to know his media conquests, only when I joined the Editorial Board of the '**AVMCC Christian Outlook**'. Today, I thank him for helping me, without preaching, to appreciate that in employing your talents for the use of God (or for any course you believe in, for that matter), you should not expect a 'thank you' or to be given a shove by anyone. Service to God is by itself a privilege, for which only God can reward you. As such you just must put in your best at all times, not minding the hurdles and not expecting a thank you from anyone!

Many actually think that being a voluntarily service, working for God should be taken for granted, to the extent that members should only do whatever is convenient for them to do. With Prince Odukomaiya, you just had to work as if you were paid for it. You had no business with the '**Christian Outlook**' if you would not brace up to the responsibilities. He ran the journal as if he was fully- employed and paid for it. He was

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not paid a dime! Nevertheless, he expected every other member to do the same. Leadership by example? I call it inspiring!

Sure, he did personally inspire me. I had worked as a reporter in the late eighties and learnt a few things on newspaper production. Working with Odukomaiya on the '**Christian Outlook**', I would say, I learnt the managerial aspect. The confidence I garnered working with him inspired me to propose, initiate and mentor '**Fegocowosa**' magazine (a publication of Federal Government College, Warri, Old Students Association). For me, the ability to ensure that members of the 'Fegocowosa' Editorial Board worked extra hard with me for the four years I edited the journal to ensure we produced and delivered to meet the Founders' Day annual programme was all due to the inspiration I got from Prince Odukomaiya.

These were very busy people, from all walks of life. I have no doubt that '**Fegocowosa**' will readily win a contest for the best old students' journals any day! Today, I publish a career counselling journal (one of the best-produced journals), thanks partly to inspirations by Prince Odukomaiya.

Have I met someone that can be described as brutally frank? Oh yes, Prince Henry Odukomaiya! He is one man who does not care whose ox is gored, not even his own ox. He doesn't even spare himself. I can assure you he even jabs himself. For him, truth must be told, if need be. He never holds his opinions back on anything. He may, for ethical reasons, but never for fear of whatever any man may think of him. And he does accept it when people express their opinions about him. Once

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it is the truth, he accepts. He may give you reasons why it happened but deny it? Not him!

Is it possible to find a detribalised Nigerian? Yes. Prince Henry Odukamaiya. Every individual is related to and respected, based on his character-worth. He probably doesn't have tribalism in his lexicon. If you asked me, I would say, he delights in making friends from across the country. He loves people who are true to themselves; who can deliver on their callings. I think his yardstick for assessing and relating to people is simply their capability to live up to whatever expectations they owe to society.

You will earn Prince Odukamaiya's love and respect if you don't fall below these expectations, irrespective of your tribe, creed, class or religion. And may God save you from his disdain if the reverse is the case.

As Prince Odukamaiya clocks 80, my prayer for him is that he continues to enjoy good health. He recognises it comes from God, which is partly why he gave his time for the 'Christian Outlook'. I pray that even as he has laboured for God (using his talents and oh yes, his mental alacrity!), that God will equip him to worship in spirit and in truth, so that at the end of this life, he will happily join the Saints Triumphant and sing with the celestial choir. We all need this prayer actually.

Let me recall one incident which took place some three or four years ago as some members of the AVMCC Publications Committee (including me) sitting together with him as we sold the journal to

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parishioners. He made an unsolicited comment, smiling mischievously as he is wont to do. According to him, the right time to work and save for 'the rainy day' is before one clocks 50/60 years, because, thereafter, you may find out that you are no longer relevant in the scheme of things. So, I got working so hard that I am currently caught in a-hard-work tango!

So, this article is coming so late because I am working for the rainy day - not just for myself, but to impact on the Nigerian fashion and textile sector, so that not only will I be empowered, I stand to ensure that a lot of small and medium businesses in the sector are empowered! Thanks partly to that challenge from Prince Odukomaiya!

A very happy birthday to you, Sir.

## An editor of editors, consummate manager

-----By Folu Koyi

IF you want a man who is very passionate about his job, look for a journalist! At least I know one. Read his profile:

He gets to the office before many of his subordinates. He diligently reviews the previous day's work, paying attention to lapses and making amends. He studiously reads the dailies for news, views and grammatical errors. He attends dutifully to all the correspondence on his table. He gets about the day's job like tomorrow will never come. Back at home, he listens with rapt attention to the day's news, waiving aside all distractions.

He is Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya, prince charming, quintessential journalist, consummate manager of men and materials.

For four-and-a-half years of my employ at Champion **Newspapers Limited** under Prince Henry Odukomaiya's management, I came in contact with him only four or five times: once on the staircase, at other times on a rare invitation! But I was always "seeing" him almost on a daily basis through internal memos.

Prince Henry Odukomaiya is adept at writing: in fact he is a wordsmith. Of course, one should not expect less of someone who had been a leader writer, features editor, training manager and editor of the good

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old '***Daily Times***'

He is simply a perfectionist who would not let go a missing punctuation mark in a news story or letter!

If the hierarchy of officialdom gave me only but a tangential relationship with the overall boss at Champion, the 16 years of my close association with him (1997- 2013): he as the editor-in-chief and I as the editor of our church journal, The ***AVMCC Christian Outlook***, really got me to know and appreciate him better.

Again you talk of humility, someone who had been in the top echelon of the popular press now managing a local church publication! But he found fulfilment there. As he himself admits, no other profession gives him joy and satisfaction as journalism.

Prince Odukamaiya is a man some people love to hate, because they consider him too rigid. Whether working in a secular, salary-paying organisation or in God's business where God Himself is the paymaster, he applies the same standard. The man just detests sloth, double-speak or chicanery.

At 78, he holds the record of being the longest-serving committee chairman in the church and decided to quit not because he had been wearied by age but to yield to younger ones!

As I said in my recent book which pays tribute to him I wish I had known Prince Henry Odukamaiya much earlier in my career; he would have made me a better journalist!

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Everywhere he went, the 'Prince of Print' left an indelible mark. It's still so visible to the eyes!



## Detribalised, but would not give his daughter to an Igbo suitor!

----- By Sir Patrice Akwara

WORKING closely with Baba, Prince Henry Olukayode Odukomaiya, since 2002 as a member of the Publications Committee of the then Archbishop Vining Memorial Church, now a Cathedral (AVMCC), located in GRA, Ikeja, Lagos State, was the next turn my life took as a young man in the concluding years of my stay in Lagos.

And through the years thereafter, my relationship with Baba metamorphosed from being my Chairman at the Publications Committee of the AVMCC to a confidant, then as a mentor, further as my father and finally he became my friend as well.

Talking as friends, in spite of the huge difference in our ages (Baba is old enough to be my grand father) and experiences, Baba always invited me to criticise him as I deemed fit especially with the release of every new edition of the '**AVMCC Christian Outlook**' published while he was the Editor-in-Chief.

As a mere undergraduate law student of the University of Lagos, I would cautiously tread through preliminary comments about the journal while gauging how he received my criticisms. Being urged on, I would then go full throttle with my comments baring my mind which, to my utter amazement, he accepted even the sharpest of 'reprimands'

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without the usual elderly people's qualms over younger ward's comments.

I have known Baba to be a thoroughly selfless person who equally demands such virtue from anybody working with him on any assignment.

I was always inspired each time he told me stories about the successes of his children and his personal challenges. I observed very closely how he doted on his two youngest children, Omotoyosi and Emmanuel. I equally observed the great details and insight he offered (almost always unsolicited) in explaining every issue or question put to him. This always made me better informed after every such encounter. I also learnt the meticulous way he attended to each assignment at hand as if his life depended on it.

Which shall I say? Which shall I leave out? The list is endless!

Is it that he knows the birthdays and ages of all Anglican bishops and priests known to him? Or his truly detribalised disposition (though he would not give out his youngest daughter to an Igbo suitor, for which he gave me plausible reasons') or his impatience with slothfulness? Or the treasured long sleeve striped shirt he bought for me on his return from one of his numerous annual vacations abroad!

But I will not forget to mention the most impact he had on me. Each time I requested him to do something for me, if it was something he could not do for whatever reason, he would find an alternative for me.

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This got me! You don't refuse a trusted lieutenant; you are bound to find a soft landing.

Unknown to my wife, when I relocated to Abuja from Lagos, I wanted to run back to Lagos to complete my tutelage under Baba especially when faced with some challenges thrown up by the soulless Abuja.

Baba is a thoroughly bred Lagosian, ever since he sailed (yes, in a paddle boat that took three days to travel from Itoikin Beach into Ebute Elefun area of the Lagos Lagoons) into the city at the age of 10 in 1944, and like most Lagosians, he does not like attending parties very far away from Lagos. That's why he did not attend my wedding or my knighthood investiture. But, like most Lagosians, he sent me a handsome cheque.

Happy birthday, Sir! May your strength grow as your years increase. Amen.

## Here comes a beloved tyrant!

-----By Godwin Ofulue

PRINCE Henry Odukomaiya could be likened to the proverbial elephant, which observers described differently, depending on the various angles from which they viewed the huge creature.

Like those little observers of that very big elephant, I was only opportuned to view Prince Odukomaiya from just one angle of his life; and that was the angle provided by the Publications Committee of Archbishop Vinning Memorial Church Cathedral. Prince Odukomaiya was the chairman of the committee while I was, at various times, a member and an assistant secretary, under his leadership.

In this attempt to describe Prince Odukomaiya based on the little view I had of him while we served together on the Publications Committee of AVMCC, I have adopted the very simple approach used in the field of theatre arts, where characters are defined based on what they do; what they say; and what people say about them.

Once upon a time, an unsuspecting member of the committee walked in while a meeting was on. Prince Odukomaiya would not allow the member to take his seat before asking him to explain his relevance to the committee. Members giggled, thinking it was a joke; but no, it wasn't. The member's response, sadly, felt short of what Prince Odukomaiya expected of him and the prince asked him to leave the committee (not the meeting), thus terminating his membership of the committee, right there on the spot, based on his unrepentant

Odukamaiya@80: In the eyes of associates

inefficiency in the tasks assigned to him over a long period.

By the time members realised that the drama was not a mere comedy, they tried to resolve the complication; but the mind of the disciplinarian could not be bent. He was later to offer justifications for the sacking of the committee member. While some members agreed with the chairman's explanation, others bowed their heads, sharing the pains of a sacked brother.

The scenario painted above is a typical example of some actions Prince Odukamaiya took as the chairman of the Publications Committee. Some members were "sacked" not because of their poor commitment to work but for the poor quality of their work.

Prince Odukamaiya could be described as a rigid stickler for discipline and quality.

Even when he exhibited traits of tenderness and softness, these were only meant for those who satisfied his ideals of discipline and quality. He could call any member 'my son' or 'my daughter' if such a member met his expectations in terms of good stories and deadlines. But the 'sonship' or 'daughtership' was never permanent; he easily disowned any "son" or "daughter" if such a member fell below expectations, especially if all efforts at calling the sinner to repentance failed.

Most importantly, Prince Odukamaiya was an exemplary leader, especially in the areas of hard work and commitment to duties. Even at

his age, the magnitude of energy he displayed at work was awesome!

Hard as he appeared in demanding and insisting on excellence at work, he had a listening ear. A number of times, I challenged his positions on issues; and a number of times he changed his positions based on my arguments. For knowing that I would always tell him my mind and disagree with him when necessary, he would always seek my views on contentious issues. A number of times, we would spend hours on the phone arguing over issues; he would try to make me buy into an action about which he had made up his mind but I would not concur if I felt differently. Rather than keeping me at arms' length for disagreeing with him fairly frequently, he would always call for my opinions whenever he had contentious issues to tackle. He would tell me repeatedly that he valued my opinions on issues.

The things he said and the ways he said them were similar to his actions. He was very rarely diplomatic in his approach to issues; he would rather hit the nail straight and directly on the head. For instance, he could easily tell low-performing members that they only attended meetings to share of the food served at meetings. He was that blunt.

Things he would say in reactions to developments were predictable. What he would say and the manner he would say it, depending on a given circumstance, could also be predicted. If you looked at the face of a member walking into the committee meeting venue, you could tell what that member expected from Prince Odukamaiya: rebuke or praise. And whatever such a member expected was exactly what the prince would give, no pretences.

Those who had defaulted in their duties would, of course, walk in with guilt written over their faces and the prince would not allow them to sit down before chastising them; while those diligent enough would be welcomed with beams of smiles and enquiries after their families, into the bargain. For him there was no room for untidiness; it is business and it must be done strictly as business. This posture was precisely the cause of disagreement between the prince and some members, especially those without journalism background. Some members had thought that, as they had experienced in other committees and societies of the cathedral, the prince would pamper them with exhortations and treat them tenderly like angels. But, oh no, Odukomaiya would not have any of that pretension; he imported, wholesale, the tyranny and the high-handedness often needed to succeed in a secular newspaper environment into the committee.

Some members perceived him as highhanded; some described him as autocratic; yet some saw him as belonging to a rare species of homo sapiens, characterised by diligence and commitment to duties.

Prince Odukomaiya is truly like the proverbial elephant; there are so many ways observers can describe him, depending on the angle from which they view him. But there is one remarkable and paradoxical thing about the way people perceive him: even those that hate his high-handedness still love him for his result-oriented and overwhelming sterling qualities.

We can, as well, call him the beloved tyrant!



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