

Ikani's Homestead Short Stories

Titbits Plucked Out

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I'm not the kind of person who bothers keeping a diary, but recently I began to think it would be fun to actually write down some of the fascinating memories I have entertained myself with over the years. I actually had a few things I recorded in diaries or on pieces of paper so that kind of material wouldn't be hard to gather in one place. The rest would have to come straight out of my head.

I hope you enjoy the few things I've managed to pluck out of my head, so to speak for your reading pleasure.

These are all real life accounts, no fiction.

Have fun.

- Ismaila Ikani Sule.

The Break-dancer

Date: Sometime between 1985 and 1986

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

My younger brother had gone out one day and came back home to tell us about the strange sight he had seen. Someone, he said, was walking down our street moving his arms like this and like that in some rhythmic, wavy motions. That was my first contact with break dancing.

Another day, my older brother, sister and I were in the sitting room (with some other family friends and relatives - I'm not so sure) when this midget walks in with rags tied around his head, elbows and knees. Oh yes, my younger brother was all dressed up ready to take the break dancing world by storm.

Say a little prayer

Date: 1988

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

A long time ago (not that lo-o-ong ago), I came across a book written by a muslim scholar on the various names of the Creator. I became quite interested in the name *Ya-Waliy*, 'O Protecting Friend', which the author said could be used when seeking God's favours. You called upon the Protecting Friend thousands of times in the night and then prayed for any good thing you sought (one never prayed for evil). I was 12 years old then and thought, oka-ay we'll see if this really works. Haha. When night came and it was time for bed, I decided to try it out. But what could one pray for?... Hmm, what about the war going on in the Middle East everyone was talking about? Yes. So, I called upon the Protecting Friend and prayed for an end to the Iran-Iraq war.

I went to bed and woke up to another beautiful morning. Later that day the big news was that the Iran-Iraq conflict had finally, formally come to an end. I didn't mention my prayer the night before to anyone else but I was going *Eeeeeeeekkk! It works!*

Don't mind me, today I'm sure I wasn't the only one praying for an end to such

wars back during the dangerous Cold War days.

Eclipse

Date: Friday, 9th of February, 1990

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

Here is one of the very, very few things I actually recorded in the many free diaries I used to get from my father, given to him at work (I used to use them mainly for my drawings):

For the first time (in my life), I witness a total eclipse of the moon.

I was fourteen.

Shooting lights in the sky

Date: 17th of November, 1998 (muslim calendar - 28th of Rajab, 1419AH)

Location: Zaria, Nigeria.

Details:

I was studying at the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria (living outside the campus with my younger brother) when I wrote this down on a sheet of paper:

“Aso Rock - Students’ Villa” (Room 34)

Sabon Layi, Tudun Wada

Zaria

(From) about 5am to 5.40am or 5.45am

My brother, Isiaka’s uncle and I, while preparing for the morning prayer and after it (the prayer), see lights shooting across the dark harmattan skies - some of them ending up as trailing lines of smoke curving downwards. My brother had seen (observed) this phenomenon and had drawn my attention (to it). He told me he had initially imagined the “shooting lights” were merely fireworks, but he said he then reasoned against this notion because they were too numerous, too frequent and too high (in the sky). One had to wait patiently to see the lights zooming

across the sky at regular intervals.

Later during the day (some minutes before noon)

While waiting for a lecture, which never held, I narrate the morning's incident to Bukar (one of my friends and classmates) and he tells me the "shooting lights" are called "ajala" in Igala (our native language).

7pm

*I decide to turn the radio on to BBC World Service (something I had not done for a long while now due to the lack of free time to do so, lack of interest and/or tiredness at the end of each busy day at "school"). Amongst the headlines is a report that people in Asia are preparing to witness a **meteor storm**. In the news summary, I manage to catch, it is stated that scientists expect this to be the biggest meteor storm in thirty years.*

(At) about 9.25pm

What had we seen in the skies this morning? My brother is not sure we saw the same storm the Asians are preparing to witness. I don't know - I think it is possible we saw the same one (meteor storm), but we would need an astronomer or scientist to clarify the matter.

Wonder girl

Date: Sometime in 1996

Location: Zaria, Nigeria.

Details:

We were in my sister's flat on the third floor, Block B, Doctors' Quarters at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Tudun Wada. There was my sister, our downstairs neighbour - Mama Chenemi - , Alhaji Mai Doya from the village and myself chatting away heartily in the livingroom. Suddenly someone ran into the room to tell us Chenemi, our neighbour's little daughter (no older than a year or two then, I believe), had been playing with Alhaji's motorcycle downstairs when the machine fell on top of her, trapping her. He-ow, panic! Her mother ran downstairs followed closely by Alhaji. I learnt later on that they had gotten the motorcycle off the little girl but she wasn't hurt. She simply stood up and ran off to play as if nothing had ever happened. I like that child!

The girl with the nails

Date: 2003

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

My cousin's one-year old daughter loves singing, dancing and playing with people. Maryam (or Tatanya as I love to call her) also used to enjoy scratching people's faces with her sharp nails (when they weren't cut). It was her own little way of exerting some power over the world of adults around her. Her two brothers tended to suffer this painful fate more than anyone else since they got to play with her most times. One night they came visiting with their father at my family's home. We noticed the fair princess had scars across her nose and cheek. Her brother seemed delighted to inform us he had ducked when she lurched at him with her nails one day. Her hand swung round his head, missing his face, and came back at her own face.

She don't scratch no one no more.

The crooked finger

Date: 1988

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

You know how parents keep warning children, especially boys, not to play rough? I remember when I was in JSS1 (first year of Junior Secondary School), I was in the classroom watching two of my friends playing a funny game. Abubakar was holding on to Uche's index finger while the other boy wriggled around trying to get his finger free. We were all laughing and having fun even when the game was over. Ah, it was soon time to go home and we waved each other off. *See you tomorrow.* The next morning we were all surprised and somewhat, fascinated, to notice Uche's crooked index finger. Oops, it had been dislocated in their little game the day before. Uche said it didn't really hurt although it was swollen. Hah, he was screaming his head off at home at the end of the day when his mother decided to straighten his finger back to normal by pulling at it.

Play nice o, children.

Mission impossible

Date: 2000 or 2001

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

This really happened one night at the cyber café where I used to work. I was on the night-shift with my colleague, Martins, a computer engineer at the café. I attended to customers while he dealt with any technical problems. It was work we really didn't want to do, especially when you bore in mind the fact that we were not being paid any night-shift allowances. No customers present. He had handed over a pirated VCD copy of the movie *Mission Impossible 2*, the latest action flick at the time. You could tell it was pirated - poor picture and sound quality. I believe it was well past 10pm when I got to the scene with Tom Cruise screeching after the girl in his sports car. Wild driving stunts. They screeched to a halt at the edge of a cliff. Suddenly there was a loud crash outside. Martins and I ran out to witness the commotion. The café was situated just some distance away from one of Kaduna's busiest roads, near a roundabout junction. We saw people gathering just after the roundabout in the dark night. A Mercedes Benz had come speeding round the roundabout and tumbled over on one of the islands dividing the road. The vehicle landed upside down and the occupants staggered out. They inspected their car and, when they were satisfied there hadn't been much damage, they proceeded to attack each other. They threw punches and kicked, each accusing the other of being the cause of the accident. I returned to my post and Martins followed. Passers-by must have helped push the car right side up again that night for it wasn't there in the morning. I continued watching the movie on my computer system. Wow, look at all that action and stunts with the motor bikes... There was another loud screech outside. Once again my friend and I dashed outside to investigate. This time someone had lost control of his scooter at crashed on to the road. The worst part was that he had been carrying a female passenger and she lay dazed on the road as people rushed to help. What a strange night. I told Martins how these events had coincided with scenes from the film he had given me to watch. We shrugged and went on with our business.

I got to the part of the movie towards the end with the helicopter and yelled to Martins to take cover. A helicopter might come crashing into the café next!

Nothing happened and I finished *Mission Impossible 2* and went to sleep.

Those voices

Date: 1998

Location: Zaria, Nigeria.

Details:

One morning I got up and prepared for lectures at the University. I put my clothes on and got my books. I got some cash out - you needed to have money on you for snacks and other emergencies. I locked the door as I came out of my room and headed for the campus. I had walked for some five or ten minutes when I realized I had forgotten to take my pen with me. I stopped walking and considered my options. Kai, I had to walk all the way back to my room and pick up the pen? Thoughts flooded my mind.

Come on, my friend, one voice suggested, you can't turn back after walking all this way. You want to be late for lectures? You've money with you, buy another pen!

That sounded like a good idea, but before I could proceed another voice hollered at me.

Buy another pen? Why waste money when you can walk back the short distance to your room and pick up the pen. Then you can spend the money on something else.

The voices began to argue inside my head until finally I had had enough and turned to walk back to my room. I unlocked the door and stepped in.

The first thing that caught my eye in the room was my money which I had all along also forgotten on my bed.

The hen

Date: 2002 or 2003

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

My mother rears chickens at home and nothing pleases her more than seeing her hens laying and hatching eggs. Hens can be quite picky when choosing the right spots around the house to lay their eggs. Sometimes two hens can decide to lay eggs on the same spot meaning they have to sit next to each other when it is time to incubate them for hatching. I can recall such a case with two hens who had to

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they mean by
"Nigerian Internet Art"!**



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sit through a dangerous night together. The chickens have their pen at the back of the house which is sometimes visited at night by hungry stray cats. Cats wouldn't have been much of a problem for these hens if they had laid their eggs inside the buildings erected for them and not outside as they had done. I was woken up in the middle of the night by a cry from one of the birds followed by a sickening, gargling sound. I guessed one of them had been grabbed by the throat by a cat. The morning came with the confirmation of my fears. One of the hens was missing. Even more saddening was the fact that she had already hatched her eggs and now the chicks would be motherless. In the world of chickens, rival mothers could be brutal to each others chicks - attacking and pecking any that didn't belong to their brood. My mother would have to look after the chicks using other artificial means. That never happened.

The second hen who had survived the cat attack, mercifully rounded up the chicks underneath her and when her eggs hatched she joined all the chicks together as her own

My mother was really touched by this act of kindness. She said animals did sometimes act with compassion like humans.

Scary morning

Date: 2002

Location: Lagos, Nigeria.

Details:

One morning, at about 7am, I was in the kitchen chatting with my cousin Sani as he had breakfast then did the dishes. Everyone else had gone off to work and we were the only 'unemployed's at home. The kitchen had one window which looked out across the landlord's compound to the gates. As he washed, Sani looked out the window to see a stranger coming in through the gates. He called me over to take a look. Who was that? When you lived in some parts of Lagos, you needed to be wary of strangers coming into your home because of the high rate of armed robberies. My cousins had been attacked by robbers at home twice before and Sani didn't want to ever go through such an incident again. We watched the young man as he began to make his way towards our front door, which incidentally was the one leading in through the kitchen. He was dressed all in dirty black clothes with a matching black baseball cap on his head. Sani began to panic. He urged me to hide so I wouldn't be seen through the window. This was becoming scary!

I watched as the stranger approached the window, he had a handkerchief tied over his nose and mouth. As he came closer, he stuck his hand into his back trouser pocket as if to pull something out. It looked like he was reaching for a weapon and my heart began to pound. Suddenly, he looked up and shouted up to the landlord on the floor above us.

Hey, he was here to dispose of the garbage!

My cousin and I heaved deep sighs of relief and laughed.

Scary night

Date: 2002 or 2003

Location: Kaduna, Nigeria.

Details:

There was a power blackout that night, a common occurrence in this part of the world. I had to use a battery operated lamp so I could see while I did the dishes in the kitchen (yes, yes, in the kitchen again!). I think it was 11pm or several minutes after the hour and I was the only person awake in the house. That is, aside from Rose, my sister's friend, who insisted on staying awake as she moved to and fro the kitchen. The night was quiet. I had to finish my work before I knew I could sleep easy.

Suddenly loud bangs filled the air. Rose became frightened. She said those were gunshots but I smiled and calmed her down. It was just some of the neighbourhood rascals playing with bangers late at night as they often did. I continued washing and she calmed down. There were more bangs, they came from the street very close to our house. Rose ran off to bed and I stopped washing and peered out the window even though I knew I couldn't see a thing in the darkness.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

That was it! I turned off the lamp - I could finish the dishes in the morning, something serious was going on here and someone might see me in the lit up kitchen.

I went to bed.

Daylight came with stories of armed robbers who had come to our area and let off a volley of wild shots into the night. Someone told my mother they had come in search of a certain house where they had intended to 'operate' but had missed their way as a result of the blackout, unable to identify their targeted address in the

dark. In their fury, they had grabbed the narrator who had unknowingly walked into their midst while out on a late night stroll. They demanded he show them the house they were looking for and when he told them he too was a stranger here, they began shooting their guns angrily. They thought they could scare him, but when that didn't work, they got back into the car they had come with and drove off still shooting.

Good for them.