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# AWOJOBICLINIC ERUWA

e - mail: [oluyombo2@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:oluyombo2@yahoo.co.uk)

phone: +234 802 420 1501

P O BOX 5, ERUWA, OYO STATE, NIGERIA.

MEDRACE Issue No 11

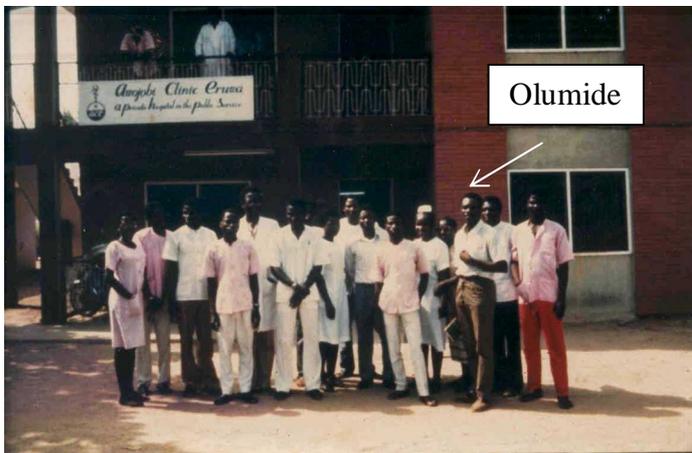
September 2014

## DR OLUMIDE AWE (1955 - 2014) - A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND CHALLENGE

Dear friends and colleagues,

On Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014, I received with shock the news of the transition of my friend, brother and colleague, Dr Olumide Olugbolahan Awe, I affectionately call Olumide. My nephew, Dr 'Kunle Arowojolu, based in Colchester, UK, informed me of the passage of this great man.

Olumide was my student at the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan in the early eighties.



Our paths crossed again and became cemented in February 1987 when he showed up in Eruwa to take up a job at Awojobi Clinic Eruwa, ACE. He was, in fact, the FIRST career medical officer to work at ACE. We eventually got to know that he and my wife, Atinuke, were born on the same day – 27<sup>th</sup> February 1955 and so, they would call themselves TWINS!!!

I could recollect vividly our encounter that constituted the interview for the job. Olumide told me: 'Sir, I wish to work WITH you.' I commented on the preposition WITH as contrasted with FOR remarking that it was that kind of relationship I looked forward to at ACE – 'a private hospital in the public service'.

When the issue came to the salary Olumide would accept, he replied 'I am not fussy about salary but I am not shy to tell my employer if he is cheating.' <http://www.ifrs-rural.com/MEDRACE%20-%20202.pdf> page 2.

Olumide's Table



His six month stint was quite eventful. He suggested a modification of the Mayo trolley for the operating table we had fabricated in 1986 which bears his name: OLUMIDE'S TABLE. (Awojobi O A Appropriate technology for operating tables. Africa Health 1994; 16: 17-19)

Our cordial relationship extended to his dental surgeon wife, Bola, and his parents such that Olumide helped us in getting an interest free loan of thirty thousand naira (N30 000.00) from his dad towards the purchase of our first xray machine in 1988. You would not know Olumide came from a very rich background.

I assisted him with some major operations at the Awe Medical Centre, Ebute Meta, Lagos before he settled in the UK.



Any time I travelled to the UK, I was a guest of the Awes, the last time was in September 2012 during the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Igbo College Old Boys Association, ICOBA, Europe of which Olumide was the chairman. I did not notice at the time that he had been ill. That he did not tell me till the end revealed the VERY STRONG character of Olumide who would not want to bother anybody with his challenges if he could face them alone. When I received the wedding invitation of his eldest son a few weeks ago, I never could imagine Olumide was gravely ill.

On appropriate occasions, Olumide had sent me inspiring emails during my struggles with the medical establishment in Nigeria.

When ACE celebrated the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary in November 2007, Olumide sent a down-to-earth paper (vide infra) **THE ERUWA YEARS - A STORY IN THE MAKING** published in the commemorative book **PRIMARY CARE SURGERY IN WESTERN NIGERIA 1977 – 2007**. ISBN: 978-978-086-485-9 Acecool Medical Publishers, Eruwa, Nigeria 2007. O A Awojobi (editor) pages 154 – 56.

<http://www.ifrs-rural.com/ACE%20ANNIVERSARY%20BOOK.pdf>

**As was usual of Olumide, he threw this challenge to me:** "Today, ACE is on new site and I know there are plans in place for other professionally aligned ventures. Vision, Self-Belief and Hard-work have made the 'dream' a reality – representations of the second phase. The first phase to my mind was the birth of the Man, Dr Awojobi. The third phase is to make sure the legacy lives on, and herein lay the kernel of TRUTH and a TEST of the man. This phase involves the gradual removal of self and a form of personal divestment that will evolve into other professionals coming to share and foster the VISION, and cement the foundation. I recall that the MAYO Legacy was a guiding light, but the situation of present-day Nigeria fails to make the task ahead any easier!"

"In private discussions and letters, I have always expressed that this mission MUST not be side tracked, and there should be recognition of limitations in terms of how much physical and emotional load in any life – not least of all Dr Oluyombo Awojobi."

And so in April 2012, ACE advertised for medical officers for the first time and in collaboration with my classmate, Dr Tayo Apampa, of Korede Hospital, Abeokuta a training programme for our junior colleagues was started which will "make sure the legacy lives on". <http://www.ifrs-rural.com/MEDRACE%20ISSUE%20SEPTEMBER.pdf>

I want to extend my commiserations to his better half, Bola, their children and his friends all over the world. My belief is that Olumide will REINCARNATE very soon through his son. Great men like Olumide do that VERY QUICKLY.

**However, Olumide lives on at Awojobi Clinic Eruwa as we use his table at least five days a week performing 160 major operations per month on the average. MEDRACE Issue 11 is dedicated to the everlasting memory of Dr Olumide Olugbolahan Awe – a source of inspiration and challenge to me.**

Dr Oluyombo Awojobi.

27<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

## **THE ERUWA YEARS – A STORY IN THE MAKING**

by

**DR OLUMIDE OLUWAGBOLAHAN AWE**

When informed mid-July that I should make some contributions towards an ACE (Awojobi Clinic Eruwa) anniversary publication, my doubt was not that I would find it difficult to write at all, or a fear of censorship (in fact, Dr. Awojobi took needless pains to assure on this), **my main worry was how I would adequately encapsulate a professionally rewarding, and personally fulfilling experience within reasonable reading limits that will not turn into a book length, and to also be able to reflect within such a write up on my gain of a life-time BONUS - the acquisition/adoption of a family – after my Eruwa stint.**

We are all pilgrims in the journey of LIFE. It is mostly with hindsight that we are able to reflect and wonder why things happen the way they do. Some people have limited blessings with the power of foresight (only GOD is totally omniscient).

In a way, the Eruwa years represent a combination of both hindsight and foresight. The argument may be: 'Which came first?' not unlike the EGG and CHICKEN conundrum, I believe.

Here is my story:

I joined the ACE 'family' in February 1987 – a voluntary step taken when I was informed by Dr J K Ladipo (aka 'JJ') that 'Yombo had gone into private practice in Eruwa. Up to that moment in time, I was a voluntary unemployed newly wedded 'young' doctor, having recently withdrawn my services from a private hospital in Lagos (which shall remain un-named), and was waiting for an application to Finnih Medical Centre, Ikeja to be considered.

**Regarding the private hospital I mentioned earlier, I resigned solely on ethical grounds – the less said about this the better, but suffice it to say the hospital represented everything that ACE was not – 'A Private Hospital in the Public Service'.**

**Willy-nilly, I made my way to Eruwa and happily applied for service (and got accepted) at half the salary I was on at the un-named private hospital.** The rest is history, as they say. I had known and interacted somewhat in a limited fashion with Dr Yombo Awojobi (my second encounter with an Awojobi) when he was a senior registrar at UCH, and later when he was one of the consultants sitting in at my Surgery 2 viva voce – **where I must say he was the most lenient and reassuringly accommodating of the examining team without prejudice to his professional responsibility.** (I

secretly think this disposition might not be unconnected to his experience at the post-graduate level exams.)

As you all might be aware, the ACE practice kicked off first on one site, a single storey building, and with my arrival, we were able to 'acquire' an adjoining bungalow as a maternity centre. The Awojobis lived in another adjoining bungalow, which effectively placed the main hospital storey building in the middle. I lived in one of the block of 4 flats across the main road, which belonged to the previous Eleruwa, Oba Olaniyan. He did not charge us a penny for occupation!

Amongst the nursing staff were three male nurses (Messrs Adesina, Okanlawon & Ajala) who were all university degree holders – a measure of the intellect and professionalism at play in the ACE setting.

There was no closing time – in practical terms. On many occasions, days actually ran into each other. But typically, following a night/evening lull, and after dinner, Dr. Awojobi and I would engage in 'intense' games of scrabble, before I retired, hopefully for the whole night.

I had most (if not all) my meals at the Awojobis'. Typically, 'tea-break' (after clinic & before elective surgery) constituted a bottle of 7-Up (pleasurably & reassuringly filling) with groundnuts for us. It was here I developed my taste for groundnuts – which had hitherto been 'forcefully excluded' by my late father from our family diet for some inexplicable reason.

Every fortnight, I would leave on Friday for Lagos, to return either on a Sunday evening or early Monday morning. Usually at month-ends, I would make purchases for ACE in Lagos, especially hard-to-acquire essentials such as the anti-snake venom injections. And if I saw some other new seasonal items, I would purchase and get refunded later. It was also very convenient (especially when I did not personally have enough funds) that my late father was handily available at his business in Idumota, Lagos Island, to lend to us money for these extra chanced-purchases – and he did this gladly.

A little digression here, if you please: you will recall that I had earlier referred to 'my second encounter with a member of that family'.

In mid-October 1977, I had abandoned an MSc program in Biochemistry at Bishop's University, Canada and returned to Nigeria on the strength of an admission into the Medical School at the University of Lagos. On getting to LUTH to register, I was informed by the Provost that I would need a letter of 'Deferment of National Youth Service Corps'. This provost – I got to know years after - later played some role in Dr Awojobi's road towards a post-graduate qualification.

Despite the support and efforts of the late Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, I tried but failed to secure this letter, hence went ahead to serve in the NYSC with a posting to Lagos.

In mid-1978, while in service, I was visiting with a 'corper' friend to the home of Dr John Sodipo at Okupe-Estate, Maryland. There I met another visitor, a man who was later introduced to me as Professor Ayodele Awojobi. He would later give me a ride to Yaba on his way home at the University of Lagos.

For a first time meeting, we covered open and interestingly illuminating conversation points. It was evident to me that I was in the presence of a great mind, and at the time, I was totally unaware that I was been made privy to highly privileged and confidential information that would later form the bedrock of the Unity Party of Nigeria campaigns on universal free education and free health.

The rest, as you all know, is now history. But then I had met my first Awojobi! Sad to say, that was the first and last meeting with this exceptional person. I subsequently had gotten to know other members of the extended family. Sad but fittingly, it was that I had to attend the funeral of the elder Engineer Yinka Awojobi in London a few months ago.

On completion of my NYSC posting, JAMB had been established and I opted to apply to University of Ibadan for Medicine and only there – no second or third choices were filled out in the application form, either for courses or other universities. Surprise! When the JAMB result came out, I was offered admission in the newly created University of Calabar Medical School. I promptly went to the JAMB office at Alexander Avenue, Ikoyi to complain. There I met a kind senior official - Registrar status I think – by the name of Inyang or Ekong (cannot remember which) who tried to explain that Calabar needed people of my background for the take-off of the Medical School. I gently responded that I appreciated greatly his thoughtful consideration; but that he should observe the 'tortuous road' I had taken to get back to Medicine, that I had not even indicated a second or third choice after Ibadan. And if I was so inclined, back in 1972, while in Lower Sixth Form at Igbobi College, University of Benin had offered me an unsolicited place as a pioneer medical student based on my WASC results – an offer which I did not take. THANK YOU, SIR – BUT NO THANKS! The man immediately then provided an admission letter for me for Medical School in Ibadan.

My time at ACE, albeit short, will forever represent a milestone in my life – and all my friends are aware of this. In fact, it is a test of your closeness as a FRIEND to be able to relate exactly who the Awojobis are in Eruwa.

The work at the hospital was very taxing – definitely not for the 'lily-livered' – but rewarding. It was another opportunity to integrate myself totally into rural life (the first was at Ogbomoso), with respect and appreciation of the people of Ibarapa. And I met many and forged sustaining relationships.

It was also a period of time to appreciate an aspect of the man, Yombo Awojobi, which was never immediately obvious to many (perhaps because of daunting credentials and heritage) – his desire to learn, irrespective of from whom or from where, and when.

An incident stands clear in my mind – this concerned the issue of spinal anaesthesia. Dr Awojobi would always insist on doing the spinals himself (I guess for his own assurance, his UCH training, and a desire to see all goes well); I tried so many times to get him to allow me, citing my Baptist Hospital, Ogbomoso experience where as a House-Officer in Surgery and O&G, this was a first learning for all, especially considering the very large number of surgeries been done and spinal anaesthesia was the preferred choice for about 95% of cases (herniorrhaphy, C/S, etc.). I actually considered myself somewhat of an 'expert'.

My opportunity came one day with a patient for who spinal was indicated. As was always the case, depending on the load on the day, while Dr Awojobi was rounding up on the OPD cases, I would do the straight-forward cases of hernias, lipomas, and then get the more involved case (usually left as last) on the table before he came in.

This particular patient was already in the theatre and ready for spinal, but Dr Awojobi was been delayed, so I decided to proceed. He then came in 15 minutes later, saw me already prepping for actual surgery, commented I had forgotten that the patient was for spinal. I responded that this had been taken care of. He did a hardly perceptible double take, asked the patient to raise legs – and zilch. Without losing stride or make any other comments, we proceeded with the surgery.

Afterwards, he declared he would wish to spend some time with Dr Tarpley and the team at Baptist Hospital, Ogbomoso. He subsequently spent a week of 'sabbatical' there from whence he returned with more ideas. That was an example of the humility of the man, despite what some uninformed say to the contrary.

As the saying goes, "behind every successful man, there is a woman", and this many would testify to as been pertinent in describing what Mrs. Atinuke Awojobi is to Dr. Oluyombo Awojobi. I have been a privileged witness to this relationship made in heaven.

I wrote earlier: "It is mostly with hindsight that we are able to reflect and wonder why things happen the way they do. Some people have limited blessings with the power of foresight (only GOD is omniscient)". It was only a few years ago that I got to know that Mrs Awojobi and I were born on the same day, same month and same year! Also, her immediate elder brother, Abimbola Makanjuola, was my senior at Igbobi College, whilst a first cousin (now deceased) was my classmate and friend at Igbobi. Parallel lives - you say? This evidently defeats the theorem about parallel-lines never intersecting! Yes, in mathematics, but not in LIFE.

These considerations do make you pause to think about LIFE. One thing I had said to my wife, (and later to Dr Awojobi sometime last year), a wife is a sister, mother, daughter and primarily a friend, ALL rolled into one and the reverse holds true! - And not one of the four life stations without the other.

I first mooted this to my wife back in 1988, and she was deeply offended that I was 'reducing' her status and refused to subscribe to this statement until her pastor used it as a preaching point in the year 2000, in London!

Over the years, I have referred many patients and professionals to visit Eruwa – not one time have they been disappointed. I expect that by spring of next year, two students from the UK would have had their clinical posting at Eruwa.

Today, ACE is on new site and I know there are plans in place for other professionally aligned ventures. Vision, Self-Belief and Hard-work have made the 'dream' a reality – representations of the second phase. The first phase to my mind was the birth of the Man, Dr Awojobi. The third phase is to make sure the legacy lives on, and herein lay the kernel of TRUTH and a TEST of the man. This phase involves the gradual removal of self and a form of personal divestment that will evolve into other professionals coming to share and foster the VISION, and cement the foundation. I recall that the MAYO Legacy was a guiding light, but the situation of present-day Nigeria fails to make the task ahead any easier!

In private discussions and letters, I have always expressed that this mission MUST not be side tracked, and there should be recognition of limitations in terms of how much physical and emotional load in any life – not least of all Dr Oluyombo Awojobi.

The idea is not to rest on one's laurels, but more to consolidate and bring on-board likeminded individuals.

I congratulate the whole members of ACE family, past and present, and especially Dr & Mrs Oluyombo Awojobi, and their children (Oluyombo Jnr. & Ayodele) on this 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary. I pray and hope that the fruits of our labour will continue to grow and live beyond us all, by GOD's Grace.

As indicated earlier, when the request for a write-up was made, I feared the task might be a mite difficult for the stated reasons. And it has been, but I hope what is written here would prove worthwhile reading.

As a footnote, I am leaving off with two quotations from two great persons of history:

1. "Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will". – Mahatma Gandhi

2. "Your own resolution to succeed is more important than any one thing" - Abraham Lincoln. (1809-1865)