THE UMUAHIAN

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EDITORIAL

In putting together this special edition of *The Umuahian* from the collective memory and appreciate reminiscences of generations of students, one has been struck again and again by the persistence of certain values of mind and behaviour which this great College seems above all else to have inspired in its pupils through the greater part of its fifty years: a love of excellence and of quiet service.

There are, of course, other attributes clearly discernible, such as that healthy skepticism which ensures that an Umuahian would take independent decision on serious matters rather than follow what our Australian teacher Charles Low,[1] described at one memorable Assembly as the "sheep principle."

But I believe that this questioning mind as well as other fine attributes of Umuahia can be distilled down to the two fundamental ideas—the pursuit of excellence in work and behaviour and the desire to serve without ostentation.

These qualities and hallmarks did not fall down from the Umudike sky one fine morning in Fisher's miraculous days but were the fruit of years of assiduous cultivation of, and attention to, students and their physical and intellectual environment. Read the letter from Robert Fisher and you see how even at ninety-two, and forty years after he had left the school, his mind was still restlessly and agilely searching for new—even unorthodox—ways of improving the quality of instruction offered by the school. Or read the portrait of William Simpson and you will see how a man who was a mathematician laid the foundation of the

[1]William Charles Low, (B.A. Cantab, M.A. Melbourne) was Assistant Principal, cricket master and English and Literature teacher at Umuahia from 1946 to 1953. He also taught Christian Religious Knowledge and informal Latin classes to the senior classes throughout his tenure. The Australian master was one of the pillars of Umuahian literary culture. He introduced creative writing into the Umuahian classroom and was the founding editor of *The Government College, Umuahia Magazine*.

literary pre-eminence of Umuahia which is now acknowledged in Nigeria and Africa; how he turned his boys away from the temptation of empty showiness in the boxing ring. Teddy Roosevelt's maxim: *Speak softly but carry a big stick* would seem to fit Simpson's plan for his boys, although the stick was primarily an intellectual weapon.

The Umuahia environment played a key role in our education. The moment a twelve or thirteen-year-old set foot on Government College and beheld that exquisitely trimmed quadrangle (mowed incidentally by one man) and the immaculate black-and-white A.D. Block,[2] he knew, whatever his previous experience, that he had stepped into a new world where it would be a crime to throw pieces of paper about. (It is an indication of the long way we have come from Fisher and Simpson and Jumbo, that cars are today parked on the famous lawn from which the beautifully manicured grass of the early days has long been routed by rank and coarse varieties.)

Umuahia has had the singular ill-fortune of suffering two major devastations in its fifty years—during the Second World War when it was shut down for about four years and turned into an internment camp, and again during the Nigerian Civil War when it suffered even greater physical and psychological despoliation. After its first disaster it was fortunate to secure the services of William Simpson as Principal for a second start. By being physically and spiritually available to the school at all hours of day and night, leaving nothing to chance, he was able to mould the school to the pristine model of excellence created by Robert Fisher. Like Fisher, Simpson had no desire for promotion to headquarters but preferred to serve quietly in his chosen outpost.

[2]The administrative block, which graces the cover of *The Umuahian*, is the school's most iconic feature. Reputedly the oldest building in the college, it is a long cement and wood bungalow structure, surrounded by a wide veranda and supported by concrete stilts. The building housed the school's administrative offices, including those of the bursar, Principal and Vice-Principal, a staff room and prefect's room, the chapel, and until 1953, the assembly hall.

Umuahia's third start has not been so fortunate. Perhaps the fate of the proverbial old woman who slips and falls down a third time is at work here.[3] Quite frankly the school is today a sad shadow of its former self. We could catalogue the many reasons for this decline, one of which would be the general fall in educational standards throughout the land but in particular in the war-torn areas such as Imo State where the spreading of grossly inadequate resources of personnel, service and equipment too thinly over vast areas of need is creating enormous problems for the future. To these entire factors one must regrettably add a discernible falling off in the quality and single-mindedness of contemporary teachers and other educational personnel.

This situation poses a major challenge to the educational authorities and a serious moral issue to us Old Boys who had the great fortune to go to Umuahia when it was still a place of glory. The issue is simply this. Have we the right to sit and watch complacently while our children and successors are given third-rate education on the very site hallowed by Fisher, Simpson and others many of whom came across seven seas to minister to our needs?

Many Old Boys in eminent and comfortable positions which their early start at Umuahia helped secure for them seem unaware of their reciprocal obligation to continue the heritage, to return in some token measure the gift their great alma mater gave them in such abundance. We seem to be unaware that the flickering torch of education in this country is in danger of extinction from rough winds and the deluge of mediocrity and neo-illiteracy, and that we who were privileged to know better have a duty to defend whatever high grounds of excellence still remain, from where in more propitious times for which we pray, a new campaign of civilization and national retrieval can be launched.

We must confess that one major obstacle to the effort of many Old Boys towards a total identification with the plight of their alma mater is the uncertainty about the true status of the

[3]From the Igbo proverb 'Agadi nwanyi da nda ugboro abuo a guo ihe o bu n'ukpa onu', meaning 'if an old woman falls down twice, the goods in her basket should be counted' (i.e. the real causes of her fall should be looked into).

college. This problem which our colleagues in Imo State have not, quite frankly, attacked with appropriate zeal and candour must now be faced without equivocation. For if they indeed view Government College, Umuahia as just another state school in their possession or even as an Odida Anyanwu Local Government School[4] there can be no justification in expecting Old Boys from other states to continue supporting it purely from sentimental considerations.

In this Jubilee year a clear decision must be taken on the future status of the school and promptly implemented. Two options have already been suggested: to press energetically for the transformation of the school into a Federal Government College, or to strike an arrangement with surrounding states in the catchment area of the old Government College for the reciprocal intake into designated schools in each state of an agreed number of pupils from the others. Either option, but especially the second, would fit into Fisher's dream of Umuahia as a "Unity School."

If we are able to resolve this minor problem of identity there is no earthly reason why the many grateful sons of this college scattered all over Nigeria and the Cameroun will not rally to her cause and provide enough money and counsel to restore her to her former dignity.

Given the quality of our foundation, Umuahia should easily hit a century, "not out,"[5] and in grand style. But it all depends on who firmly we pledge in this fiftieth year to re-establish in this corner of Africa in the manner of our original founders a school which shall serve the country and mankind as a true centre of moral and intellectual light.

Chinua Achebe ('44)

[4]The western county council to which Umuahia pertained at the time; a school run by the local government.

[5]Cricket terminology. A century is a score of 100 or more runs in a single innings by a batsman, who will be not out if he has not been dismissed by the end of the innings.

THE CHALLENGE OF REVEREND ROBERT FISHER

(1887-1979)

FOUNDER AND FATHER

By E.C. Nwokoma

In the glorious annals of mankind a few names stand out of those who, while they lived, did so much so quietly for humanity; who gave the little they had in the midst of the much they desired; from whose example inspiration can be drawn at all times, and human civilisation enriched.

One such man was the Reverend Robert Fisher, founder and first principal of Government College, Umuahia. Time and again, Fisher's name has rung a bell in the history of education not only in Nigeria, but in West Africa as a whole.

Born on May 24, 1887, Robert Fisher spent his boyhood days at Groombridge, Sussex, where his father later became vicar. He studied at Marlborough College, Pembroke College, Cambridge and Wells Theological College, and in 1909 became curate of St. Mary's Tottenham, London.

As a curate, the Reverend Robert Fisher was dedicated to his calling, always believing that he had a very special mission to fulfill in his life-time. In pursuit of his pastoral calling, he came to Africa, first to the Gold Coast (now Ghana) as a priest in charge of Christ Church and principal of the Grammar School in Cape Coast. From Cape Coast his missionary career took him to Accra where he became priest in charge of Holy Trinity Church.

In 1920 he transferred from missionary work to the Education Department of the Gold Coast and was involved in the building of Achimota College. (It is conceivable

that the Achimota emblem of black-and-white keys may have played a part in the black-and-white torches of Umuahia.) Robert Fisher was clearly not the kind of priest who wished to confine himself to pulpit or even church premises. He was convinced he had a very active part to play in the social life of the community. So, he went on to form, and became secretary of, the Gold Coast Teachers' Association.

In 1928, Robert Fisher was transferred to the Education Department in Nigeria and posted to establish Government College Umuahia where, for nine years, he literally worked miracles by sheer dint of hard labour, and magnanimous, yet humble gestures. The Government College, Umuahia rose from acres of jungle to become the dream secondary school of West Africa, attracting some of the best brains from all states of Nigeria, westwards as far as Ghana and eastwards as far as the Camerouns. It is a tribute to Reverend Robert Fisher's sound educational principles that Government College, Umuahia has continuously produced some of the most eminent scientists, men of letters, artists, engineers, statesmen, businessmen, sportsmen and other men of excellence in virtually all other walks of life.

While at the Government College, Umuahia, Reverend Robert Fisher turned down an offer to become a Bishop in preference to his mission as an educationist. He also turned down an offer of promotion which would have taken him away from his beloved college.

In 1933, he married his second cousin, Ruth White. When Fisher retired from Government College in 1938, he went home to become vicar of West Dean. But for him, out of sight was not out of mind. He maintained his links with Umuahia in diverse ways.

As a tribute to Fisher's dedicated service and his vision of unity Fisher Shield (for athletics) and Fisher Cup (for soccer) biannual competitions were established for

the six leading Eastern Nigerian Boys' Secondary Schools of Fisher's days, viz.Aggrey Memorial College, Arochukwu, C.K.C. Onitsha[6], D.M.G.S., Onitsha,[7] Government College, Umuahia, Methodist College, Uzuakoli, and Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar.

In 1969, the Reverend Robert Fisher donated ₦ 2,400[8] to resuscitate the libraries of six colleges that were ravaged in the eastern states during the civil war—a kind and noble gesture which ex-students of those schools still remember with a sense of affection.

He had then envisaged that he might not be alive till the end of the war and so paid this money to various education authorities in England to disburse to the respective colleges in Nigeria, at the appropriate time.

Earlier he had also donated ₦2,000 to Eastern Nigerian students studying in Britain during the civil war. Then in 1970, he set up a Trust Fund in aid of Government College, Umuahia, with an initial sum of ₦9,000 and further willed the sum of ₦8,000 to the college, in the event of his death and that of his wife who was then 83 years old.

These acts of self-sacrifice were prompted by the great sadness he felt when he learnt of the effect of the civil war on the College, and to raise the fund, he decided to sell his personal house in which his wife and he had been living and they became tenants to the buyer. But that was not all. His sister, Ethel Fisher who had been a

[6]Christ the King College, Onitsha (est. 1933), the first grammar school established by the Roman Catholic Mission in Eastern Nigeria.

[7]Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha.

[8]The naira was introduced on 1 January 1973. Hence, Nwokoma, Achebe or Nwachukwu (the Assistant Editor) must have translated the figures of Fisher's donations from pounds.

missionary to China donated ₦5,000 for her brother's sake to Government College, Umuahia. The objective of this additional donation to the college was to provide a mobile Education Unit (a film lorry) which, under the direction of sixth form students, would tour schools, villages, and neighbouring country-side market places, to provide and display educational films, thereby helping to bring the College out of its own shell into the world beyond, one of the cardinal points of Fisher's educational philosophy.

The idea, in his own words was "to link the school and the people together." The Reverend Robert Fisher lived for Nigerians, and gave all he had to foster education and unity in the nation. In 1971, he suggested to the authorities in Lagos and elsewhere to rename Government College, Umuahia Unity College, and appealed to them to recognize that the supreme aim of the college was to kindle this spirit of unity in which the college was founded. Indeed, Fisher's Government College, Umuahia is the fore-runner of the present Federal Government Colleges.

In 1973, the Reverend Robert Fisher suffered an irreparable loss. His wife of forty years died; the companion with whom he had spent so much time and worked so hard—with whom he had shared all his love for impoverished humanity. On her death, he left Torquay to live with his sister, Ethel, in Winchester.

In 1974, he initiated the construction of a Community Centre at Government College, Umuahia, aimed at linking the college more closely with the community in every possible way, as well as introducing handicraft into the school's curriculum—enriching the student's education and the life of the community around him.

The death of the Reverend Robert Fisher on June 18, 1979 at the age of 92, robbed Government College, Umuahia of a devoted founder/principal whom we had come to regard as an immortal. Perhaps his spirit, in far away England, knew that on

June 17, 1979, his Old Boys Association met at Umuahia to inspect and approve the first wing of the Fisher Community Centre under construction, thus bringing his long-cherished dream one step nearer fulfillment.

The Reverend Robert Fisher has come and gone, but his spirit will live forever in the great institution he created and bequeathed to us. Those lucky souls into whose lives the Reverend Robert Fisher has walked have had a solid and spiritual civilisation. To them much was given; on them is imposed a duty; to place Nigerians, nay the black man, on the rail, through their knowledge and experience of this great man who lived, gall all, and died so that we may reap the true fruits of academic and spiritual education.

What a challenge to us old boys of the Government College, Umuahia! What a lesson to all Nigerians!! Let us rise and shine like one!

LETTER FROM FISHER

June 17, 1978.

My Dear Principal,

Your letter dated May 31st reached me this morning—I think it must have travelled by boat or by road! I was delighted to receive it. I must confess that not having heard from you since your accession to the Umuahian Throne, I had begun to suspect that you were not anxious to continue connection with a non-Nigerian "founder". Politics being what they are, I would not blame you for this attitude, though I should have regretted it. However, your letter has made me very happy in consequence, and I am happy to retain the halo that the College has placed on my antique head, though quite undeserving of it.

Life was so easy in my days, with only 150 boys at most to deal with, and ready support for my various experiments from Government sources. We are very lucky to have Alec Gibson as Treasurer Trustee of what funds I can spare; for his school has approximately the same number of boys and girls as you have—1,500, and like you he is beset with financial problems. Make full use of him; since his visit to Umuahia he has become very interested in the school. He will shortly be retiring, having become of pensionable age, but if you feel he can be useful to you in any way, I am sure he will be willing to act as a sort of liaison officer, representing the College in this country.

I suppose the village of Umudike has grown to town status by now. Is my very old friend "Rufus" Chief Nwakaire—still vigorous? I hope—when the time comes—that the College will bear in mind his great services to it in the days of long ago. Indeed

I am not sure whether the claim to be the first Umuahian ever should be his or mine! Although he started as a humble "messenger" I relied on him from the first to give me advice in solving local problems! I hope when the time comes the College will find some way of giving him a worthy memorial.

Dear Otisi[9]—if I may address you in this way—I have often thought that a College like ours should not be separated from the life of the people round about. I believe you already have a primary school attached to the College for the children of the village—and that is good. Have you ever given thought to the idea of really trustworthy lads in the top form or forms being allowed to board out in homes in the village? The advantages are obvious—relieving congestion in the dormitories—effecting close links with the neighbourhood—above all enabling adolescent lads to lead a natural life. The disadvantages are equally obvious—the danger of causing sex scandals! But I have always felt that nothing can be more unnatural than cooping boys together without any outlet to their sexual instincts in a normal way during those very adolescent years when nature is pressing sexual instincts upon them. This is one of my mad ideas! And I expect you will be wise to pay no attention to it! But I maintain my principle that the separation of the sexes during adolescence is unnatural; and with the help of the "pill" awkward consequences can usually be avoided.

Pay no attention to my unorthodox suggestion.

I have not heard how my suggestions for a Community Centre are being put into practice—probably not at all. No blame will attach to anyone. You have so many problems thrust upon you, and who am I, the ancient of days, to visualize either your needs or your possibilities. It is high time that I retired into the shell in which 91-year-

[9]Otisi O. Otisi was Principal of Government College, Umuahia from 1975–79.

olds should rightly be restrained, and forebore to make suggestions for those who live in a world of which I have no experience.

My sister—aged 88—and I are both as well as our age will allow us to be—I feel—anyway, as far as I myself am concerned—that I have no right to go on living in this sphere, and am anxious to move on to whatever awaits us on the other side of bodily death. I believe that there is a future for us—otherwise what is the purpose of this life at all—and I see no practical reason why our thought-life should not continue outside our body; so I expect it will. Anyway, my thought-life still centres largely on my 25 years in West Africa, though my body left it just 40 years ago.

I must not waste any more of your time.

With all my best wishes for you and for the College,

[Handwritten and signed]

Yours very sincerely

Robert Fisher

MY RECOLLECTIONS OF MR. R.F. JUMBO

By B.O.N.ELUWA (34')

Different people are remembered for different things. Some are remembered in the realms of science for their inventions and some for their outstanding work in music, art, poetry and other creative writings. Still others are remembered for their feats in exploration, their military brilliance, their astute statesmanship, their outstanding performance in sports, or their leadership in social reformation.

Although Reginald F. Jumbo may not fall into any of these groups on a world scale, no history of the Government College, Umuahia can be complete without mention of this veteran secondary school teacher. At a time when very few Nigerians had attained the Higher Elementary Teachers Certificate to qualify them either to head primary schools or to teach the junior classes in the few secondary schools then existing in Eastern Nigeria, R.F. Jumbo was already the most senior Nigerian member of the College teaching staff. Among his counterparts in other parts of the country, mention may be made of such pioneer secondary school teachers as J.A. Ojo and D.A. Onojobi of King's College, Lagos, as well as the late F.O. Awosika of the Government College, Ibadan.

My first contact with Mr. Jumbo was at the 1933 entrance examination of the College held in the Old Library. He was the invigilator. Unlike most such examinations, that year's entrance examination was also taken by the Class 1 students of the College as a promotion test.

Tall, black and handsome, Mr. Jumbo was a most impressive figure. He looked to me ultra neat in his short sleeved white shirt with open neck, his light green khaki short-knickers well starched and smoothly ironed, with light brown hose and well

polished brown shoes to match. His jet black hair was very well cut and parted, and his equally black moustache, well trimmed.

On that entrance examination day he looked to me like a handsome giant. Certainly he had a commanding bearing. Even more than that, his ability to notice boys either whispering to each other or attempting to peep at other boys' papers seemed to me most uncanny. "Keep your eyes on your paper there!" "Stop whispering there or I'll send you out!" he warned. His intonation was cultured.

When I finished writing the examination several minutes before time and brought my papers to hand in to him, I saw another aspect of him. He smiled at me and asked if I had read over my answers. There was still time to read over carefully, he advised me. "What a nice man", I thought to myself. "He is kind, and certainly wants me to pass this examination." So, more than ever before, I began to wish it was possible for me to enter the college.

I did not see Mr. Jumbo again until I entered the Government College on scholarship about two months later in January 1934. He was not only one of my teachers but he was later my Housemaster (House III).

While my first impression of Mr. Jumbo as a kind man remained, I came to know him as a disciplinarian as well. You could not escape with untidiness, or lateness or any form of indiscipline from his experienced and sharp eye. And of course you may find yourself on the famous Umuahia "Matchet Parade" on any of these grounds.[10]

[10]After the Saturday parade, during which students lined up in quasi-military formation for inspection by the Principal and the Senior Housemaster, the former would read out a list of the week's offenders. The standard punishment was an interval of grass cutting – known by the name of detention – proportional to the gravity of the offense.

However, it was characteristic of Mr. Jumbo's sense of justice that you were not punished without being given an opportunity to defend yourself. Many an old boy of Umuahia of my time would recall hearing Mr. Jumbo ask someone who had run foul of the school's regulations: "Now, my boy, tell me why I should not put you on matchet parade."

By the time you were through Umuahia, this type of query had prepared you for life in the civil service or some other employment. It had taught you that the boss had a right to your explanation, and that a query was not inevitably accompanied by punishment. But if you were the type who relied on a lie as a present help in time of trouble, you might be disappointed.

Mr. Jumbo was not only the Senior African tutor in my time, he also played many other important parts in the life of the school. And whatever he tried his hands at, he seemed to accomplish quite competently. He taught Mathematics, Geometry and Algebra in the junior classes. He was the School's Housemaster, its catering officer and its keen sports promoter. Cricket was his favourite game.

It was typical of Mr. Jumbo to take a quick action once he reached a decision on a matter. For instance when the boys grumbled about the quality of the food produced by John, the Cook, and expressed preference for the stew prepared by Okpanku (the Firewood man) Mr. Jumbo effected an immediate change. He told the Cook, "You must let Okpanku do the cooking, the boys seem to like his cooking." And that was that.

As Housemaster, Mr. Jumbo carried his love of beauty and neatness into house inspection and aesthetic gardening. Almost a carbon copy of the Principal, Rev. Robert Fisher, whom he succeeded as my Housemaster, Mr. Jumbo was very meticulous in house inspection. I almost said "fastidious" because his eyes hardly ever missed a

cobweb or a speck of dust even if the cobweb was under the chair or the dust was at the far corner of the top of the cup-board.

Mr. Jumbo also noticed whether or not you were clean and neat. One day a classmate of mine, Master Umoh, passed Mr. Jumbo in the premises. Umoh's hair was recently cut by a fellow student, but not so well done. Mr. Jumbo stopped him and remarked "Boy if you want to barb your hair, barb it properly." He used the word "barb" that way to make himself understood. Thereafter we used it to tease Umoh.

Mr. Jumbo also taught us the good manners of listening when others are talking, especially if they are your seniors. If one was fond of having his say when Mr. Jumbo was speaking, he would cut him short with the warning: "Don't talk when I am talking, that is impudent." Mr. Jumbo was house-proud. This showed in the beautiful collection of art objects with which his sitting room was decorated, including two giant engraved brass trays and many other art objects from various parts of the country.

Whenever Mr. Jumbo wanted to send a message to his house, he frequently sent us boys. But he was rather selective as to who to send. I had the privilege of being one of such errand boys, and can recall how I used to restrain myself from touching those attractive decorations in the sitting room. I even had the occasion of entering his bedroom and can still see it in my mind's eye and recall the sensation of the grandeur of its four-poster bed.

Another manifestation of Mr. Jumbo's taste, if I may be pardoned that analogy, was to be seen in the type of woman he chose for his life companion. Mrs. Jumbo was one of the prettiest women you ever saw. She was fair, petite and always well groomed and dressed. Mrs. Jumbo was truly a lady—she was gentle, soft-spoken and kind, especially to young people. She ran one of the sewing classes in the school at which the

junior boys learnt how to mend their clothes, and her class was the next in popularity to that of Mrs. Fisher.

Although as little boys we feared Mr. Jumbo, as mature men we appreciate his efforts to develop us. The fact notwithstanding that Mr. Jumbo, a product of the Normal College, Bonny, was not a graduate teacher, he was an educated and cultured man with a good sense of humour. His ability to rise up to the standard of excellence set by the Rev. Robert Fisher and the preponderantly British staff of the school was admirable. In our judgment as young people Mr. Jumbo was as good as some of the best of them and better than most.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge that though these recollections are written by me, they are not entirely mine. This is because several of my former classmates to whom I spoke about it volunteered to me their own recollections some of which I have included here.

REMINISCENCES OF GOVERNMENT COLLEGE, UMUAHIA IN THE FORTIES

by C. CHIKE MOMAH ('44)

My principal ambition, as I entered my last year in primary school, was to become a priest. The year was 1943, and I was a Standard Six pupil in St. Michael's School, Aba. The clerical urge was strong in me, and the sole path that led to that calling lay, or so it seemed to me, through the Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha. If I thought about Umuahia, there were two main reasons for that. One was the fact that my elder brother, Godwin, was already there. The other was that my headmaster, the late Mr. Okongwu, thought the Government College, Umuahia, was the best school in the country. He attached great importance to some of his boys passing the entrance examination, and used a simple but dramatic device to impress this on us.

The previous year, 1942, not one of the Standard Six boys had been successful in the examination. In bitter disappointment, Mr. Okongwu had caned the whole class, boys as well as girls. It did not matter to him that in all other entrance examinations, the school had done well. It was simply a matter of the school's prestige: Umuahia was Umuahia. My class, the next in line, sat up. In the upshot we did well enough, with three successes, to turn his anger aside.

He was a most remarkable man, Mr. Okongwu. Even before we sat the examination, he made one prophecy. He told us that there was a boy in Ogidi, whom he had left in Standard Three, three years earlier. He was sure that any of us who had the luck to pass the examination would meet this boy in Umuahia, and the boy would "make the rain that would drench us." Mr. Okongwu was doubly right. The Ogidi boy

not only won a scholarship to Umuahia, but in class, left all of us trailing badly. But that is another story.

My very first sight of the Government College, with its rows of red-roofed dormitories its beautiful green lawns and its magnificent Administration building turned my mind away from Dennis Memorial Grammar School. That and the odd fact that though I sat the missionary school entrance examination, I have not received my result to this day! That was the end of my dreams of priesthood.

I had the most pleasant of interviews. The principal carried me on his knees while he chatted with me. I don't know how many other boys he treated similarly and I never tried to find out. But it meant that I entered Umuahia in January 1944 thinking that it was some kind of child's play. I was very quickly disillusioned. I, in common with most of the boys found the attitude of the class two boys rather overbearing. They certainly did their best to make us feel the fags[11] we were, the human equivalent of rats who were supposed "to be seen but not heard." The senior boys, in class three, were mostly very helpful to us if occasionally condescending. We were in fact officially assigned, each of us, to a Class Three "master". I personally cannot complain about my "master", for he must have been the pick of the lot, and did everything to ease me into the life of the school. Again I will mention no names, but though I have lost contact with him now, he knows that I am eternally grateful to him.

[11]*Fags*: As in the English public school tradition, other Form I boys at Government College were called 'fags' by their fellow students. Each fag was assigned a senior student, who was expected to act as the student's guardian and help him find his bearings in the school. More often than not, fags performed menial tasks for the school's senior students.

Quite early, my elder brother administered something of a shock to me. One day I was chatting with him. Then I became aware that he was not responding as he should have been doing. Instead he had his arms akimbo and was looking at me with a very disapproving expression on his face. I stopped and only then he said: "I don't understand what you're saying"—or words to that effect.

"You don't understand?" I asked, puzzled. "I don't!" he snapped, "And as long as you continue to talk in Igbo, I won't understand you." Well, you could have knocked me down with the old feather. My brother couldn't understand our language? Then the suspicion of what he meant began to dawn on me.

"You mean we're not allowed to speak Igbo here?" "Yes!" he said, by which I think he meant "No." I suppose there might be more dramatic ways of impressing a school rule on a fag, but my brother's method was very effective. From that day to this, to my eternal shame, I can hardly make a sentence in Igbo without mixing in a word or two of English.

Talking about fags reminds me that our turn naturally came the following year, in Class Two, to lord it over the new boys. I cannot claim to have contributed much to this traditional harassment of freshers. I took one long look at some of the fags and decided that it would be wise to choose my victims with a great deal of care.

Time dims the memory. But I cannot forget the handsome Mr. Ogle, who was our history teacher until he left in the middle of 1944, my first year. An upstanding man, with a soldierly bearing, he was said to have seen some action in the jungles of Burma in the early part of the Second World War. That war had not ended when I entered Umuahia and Mr. Ogle was principally responsible for keeping the school informed of its progress, particularly in Europe. He had a map of Europe put up on a wall, and

shaded in the advance of the allied powers on Germany as they bore down on her from East and West. As good and loyal subjects (or rather protected persons) of his Imperial Majesty, we fervently prayed for the success of the "free" world. I found Mr. Ogle a wonderful history teacher and he certainly enthralled us with some fascinating stories of the ancient world.

Mr. Hicks, my first principal, left Umuahia at about the same time as Mr. Ogle. He too was said to have fought in Burma or India. He was a very gentle and kindly soul, and had a halting speech peculiarity which at first amused, but later rather endeared him to us.

The late William Simpson was something else altogether. He took over from Mr. Hicks, after two terms of 1944. A man of commanding presence and considerable bulk (hence he was nick-named "Dewar"),[12] he quickly impressed the school with the dynamic force of his personality. Over the next six of seven years, he literally built the very high post-war reputation of the school by the strength of his will-power.

"When Mr. Simpson comes," said Mr. Jumbo, the one and only Housemasterin the early days of 1944, "you will have a house-master and principal rolled into one." Mr. Jumbo was right, "Dewar" took an interest in all aspects of the life of the school and made us work hard whether studying or playing. Because he thoroughly disapproved of ostentation and loud colours, he restricted the boys to the simplest clothes and shoes, morning or night.

Clearly Mr. Simpson put a little more emphasis on book-work than on football. The school was outstanding, though we may say so, in academic work and achievement. It was a different story in football, in which we were regularly trounced by all the other

[12]See below for an explanation of this nickname.

known schools. C.K.C. of Onitsha indeed went so far on one occasion as to beat us by 10 goals to one. A story, no doubt apocryphal, went round that the C.K.C. principal, on that occasion, had the victorious team whipped for not making an all-out effort to increase the goal tally. The one memorable success we had in this game was when the school quite unexpectedly beat the mighty C.I.C. Of Enugu,[13] a team comprising, among others, the Ishi brothers of Calabar, the master dribbler Friday Okoh, and the astute defender ChukwudiOnwudiwe. In fairness to the C.I.C. team, it should be said that they were on their way to play an important match against Port-Harcourt, and were perhaps not keen to take any chances of injury in an unimportant game against a weak Government College, Umuahia team.

Mr. Simpson introduced the Umuahia Run. This was a punishment which consisted of running a distance of, I think, one and half miles, mostly up-hill and at an almost Olympic pace. I confess I hated it, and with good reason. Not only was I not naturally endowed with fleetness of foot but my out-size head tended to pull me backwards as I tried to thrust my body forward. I fear I never succeeded in doing the "run" in less than twice the time allowed. Invariably this meant another run.

If some of us never succeeded in doing the Umuahia Run in the stipulated time, it was not because our physical and sporting development was in any way overlooked. Indeed Mr. Simpson attached sufficient importance to sports and our physical well being to insist that every boy must participate in all games. Even Gregory Andem played football, though he never seemed in his six years, to come to terms with the direction of play, and was as likely to score a goal against his own side as his opponents. He was not alone. I was never sure if my friend, Chinua Achebe, knew the right end of a

[13]C.I.C. Enugu: College of the Immaculate Conception, Enugu.

cricket bat. **[Achebe's editorial note: He probably didn't!]** The important thing was that every one participated and generally seemed to enjoy doing so.

Boys in other schools used to think of Government College, Umuahia boys as swots. The truth of course was somewhat different. We certainly studied hard, had "prep" every afternoon, and when an important examination approached it was not unknown for some of the boys to sneak out in the dead of the night to burn their candles in the most unlikely nooks and corners. It was really a matter of the boys deluding themselves into believing they were working as hard as they should for the examinations. When caught, they were made to pay the price.

Not only did we play almost as hard as we studied (our considerable successes in cricket, boxing, hockey and athletics testified to this fact), but a tradition grew up that the last day before the School Certificate Examination had to be a day of total relaxation. Unfortunately this led directly to a tragedy for my class in December 1948. The day before our Cambridge School Certificate Examination was to start, we went on a picnic to the banks of the Imo river, some twenty-five miles away from the school. We returned to the school, some hours later, without two of the boys. Green and Derima, two "Salt-water" boys[14], were certainly among the best swimmers of the class. But they had got drowned, mercilessly sucked in by the eddies of the river. I remember I was "nursing" a jiggered toe on the bank of the river, while my class-mates were enjoying themselves in the water. A canoe-man who knew the river well, and had been hired to ferry us across to the opposite bank could not immediately be persuaded to go into the water to look for Green and Derima. He said that the spot where they were last seen was inhabited by a bad ju-ju, and no one ever swam there. The two bodies were recovered,

[14]Originally from the Niger Delta Area.

Green's two days, and Derima's four days later. They were both buried in the school compound and it became the responsibility of my class to look after the two graves.

One of my two Principals, I cannot now recall if it was Mr. Hicks or Mr. Simpson instituted the policy of "fight your own battles." By this I believe he meant that each boy should be able to look after himself in a fair or equal fight. It also meant that, if you were not sure of your own strength, it would be unwise to provoke another boy. The result, contrary to what one might think, was not bedlam. The very few fights I saw in Umuahia were almost invariably between equals. Water, as they say, finds its own level. Moreover, any boys caught in a private fight, were summoned before the Housemaster, were made to put on proper boxing gloves, and asked to conclude their fistcuffs in a more public arena. This happened two or three times in my first year, but thereafter I cannot remember that there were other such public settlements of private disputes.

I recall clearly one such fight between two boys, one of whom had grown up in Lagos and the other in Enugu. As they were being helped into their boxing gloves, the "Lagos" boy was heard to say over and over again that he would show the other boy that he came from Lagos, "the centre of boxing." When they joined action, the tables were very surprisingly turned, and it was the boy from Enugu who administered the more telling punches. The Lagos boy found himself at the receiving end of so many straight lefts, left and right crosses and devastating uppercuts that he was reduced to clinging to his adversary as often as he could. He eventually grew a little taller than had seemed likely in his early days in the college, and there were some cranks who expressed the thought that the numerous uppercuts he received in that fight must have been largely responsible for his upward growth!

As I said above, the policy of "fight your own battles" did not lead to chaos. Not only were there very few fights between the school boys, but there was never an instance when the boys threatened, let alone beat up, a teacher. Well perhaps, not quite. There was a white teacher who had come to Umuahia from King's College, Lagos, and was said to have been beaten up (or nearly so) in Lagos. This teacher had a habit — perhaps excusable in those colonial days— of making the occasional ill-considered remark about Africa and especially her politicians. He must have really over-stepped the mark one day. An Abiriba boy reflecting more the fierce and warlike temper of his forebears than the phlegmatism of the typical Umuahia Government College boy decided single-handedly to teach him a lesson. Tucking his loin-cloth in bellicose fashion between his spindly legs, he set out for the white teacher's house. He came back ten minutes later, mission unaccomplished. Apparently in mid-stream, he had thought better of it and changed his mind.

With all due respect to the present generation of teachers in my alma mater, we had in those (good old) days a very dedicated staff, in which every single member made a one-hundred percent effort. Relations between staff and students were on the whole excellent. The forties, be it remembered, was very much the colonial period, as well as a period of rising nationalism and there was doubtless, on one part as the other, the occasional cause for friction. Personally I had the impression that the white half of the teaching staff, and perhaps one or two of the Africans considered it a radical sign if any of the boys so much as read the West African Pilot or the Nigerian Spokesman. Listening to the radio was allowed; there was in fact a radio set, that had obviously seen better days, in the Assembly Hall. The young Anthony K. Sam Epelle had a habit of always fiddling with it, and for his pains was regarded as something of a political renegade by the Principal. A.K. Sam Epelle remains to this day, no doubt, an

information fanatic; he certainly achieved renown in the course of his civil service career in Information Services around the country. The boy is the father of the man.

It would be stretching the truth unduly to suggest that there were no teachers whom rightly or wrongly we considered as "scoundrels". As little black colonial boys, we thoroughly disapproved of, but could do little about, the white teacher, already referred to above, who now and again reminded us that he was "sick and tired of this African stupidity." He was always derisively referring to our "Renascent Africa!"[15]

The same white teacher instilled discipline in us by an overly harsh use of the wooden ruler on our knuckles, and good English by an extremely severe marking system, which consisted in deducting one point for any grammatical or spelling error. So a boy might score 30 out of 50 for an essay (which represented for this teacher the pinnacle of achievement), only to lose 35 points for specific errors in the text. The outcome: minus five out of fifty! He was said to have been involved in the marking of the Cambridge School Certificate Examination in those days and we pitied any school whose English papers were marked by him. Failure in English meant automatic failure in the whole examination. Umuahia boys had one consolation: as he was a teacher in our school, he would never be required to mark our papers. I believe however he left Umuahia just before the first post-war class sat the Cambridge School Certificate Examination.

Mr. Jumbo, sole housemaster in the first year or two of the post-war era, was an impressive hulk of a man whom we both respected and feared. "Black dog appears" was often the signal of his approach. He may have been black, but he was certainly not a dog

[15]*Renascent Africa* (1937): the influential political manifesto of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's foremost nationalist leader.

in any metaphorical sense of the word. He spoke sharply often enough to an errant boy and wielded an authority over us that was almost equal to that of the Principal. Frankly we feared him more than we feared the gentle Mr. Hicks. Later in the year, when Mr. Simpson took over from Mr. Hicks, the situation changed. The school was divided into three houses, and two other housemasters were appointed. Not only that, but "Dewar" soon showed he was in charge and intended to remain so.

The unflattering sobriquet "Black dog" was purely and simply an uncritical application of a phrase lifted from R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* to describe a contemporary personality. The same uncritical borrowing from literature was responsible for one of the boys being called Captain Bligh. Captain Bligh, in the book *Mutiny on the Bounty*, "messed in his cabin." The boy in question unfortunately "messed" in class while the book was being read, and from that day became known as Captain Bligh. Nigerians can sometimes be irritatingly indifferent to the correct meanings and definitions of words!

Mr. Jumbo was a tough and uncompromising housemaster, who knew the school from its inception in 1929. He had a refreshing directness of approach, whether in anger or good humour. He once accused the boys in the College net-ball team of "catching breasts instead of the ball". The occasion was a net-ball match against a Women's Teacher Training College. Some of the boys, I regret to say, were rather carried away by the occasion, and did not always keep their eyes on the right ball. I don't remember that there were any more netball matches after that occasion.

Although it is invidious to single out teachers for mention in this article I must refer to two other teachers. Charles Low, an Australian who in 1948 grew a shaggy beard in commemoration of the centenary of the birth of the grand old man of cricket,

W.G. Grace, gave me my love of cricket. He would stop Namseh Eno, or Patrick Ozieh or the late, much regretted, Christopher Okigbo any time, or place, and together they would go through the whole repertoire of cricket strokes from the forward defensive push to the most delicate and delectable late-cut. Did he not once have the whole school practicing the same strokes during the Physical Training sessions? He made efforts to implant rugby in the school, but it did not really catch on. Whenever I see Namseh Eno, undoubtedly Mr. Low's most famous Nigerian cricketing pupil, batting, I always recall his mentor.

J.C.Menakaya (Menaks) was the perfect example of the fact that you don't need to have a degree to be a master of your subject. The boys of Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha, and of Umuahia Government College would agree that Menaks was just about the best geography teacher that has ever been. He was rough-hewn figure with prominent jaw-bones. Dennis Memorial Grammar School's loss was Umuahia's gain, and when he finally left Umuahia to go to England, to take a degree in geography, many of us were convinced that in England he might improve his knowledge of English, but scarcely of Geography.

Life in the school was good. It would not be an exaggeration to say that we were the envy of all schools in, at least, Eastern Nigeria. For one thing, apart from the Middle School in Owerri (a very poor relation in the forties), our alma mater was the only Government College in the Region. It was as if the entire resources of the Government were concentrated in the Umuahia Government College. We enjoyed the best food of all schools in the Region, and were supplied on the first day of every term with at least one shirt and one pair of shorts, even if it was occasionally only for games. In fact just about the only thing we were not supplied was pocket-money. All this, notwithstanding that it was far and away the cheapest school around.

If I were to hazard a guess, I would say that fully 90% of the boys must have looked forward to the beginning of each term. Returning to the school meant for many of us a return to a more agreeable physical environment and to a vastly improved diet. This is not in any way to suggest that mother's cooking was not, then as now, the best in the world. Rather it is an indication that at Umuahia, we had a more balanced diet than most parents could have given us. Not infrequently, a visiting sports team, after enjoying the school's hospitality, would return to their school with a burning desire to do something to improve their food. In one or two schools, the boys even went on strike. When other schools played host to teams from Umuahia Government College, they usually had special food prepared for the two teams only, different from what the rest of the school ate. (I must add that near the end of my days in Umuahia I had an occasion to be in King's College, Lagos, for a period of one week. After that week, I think I became less boastful of Umuahia food than I used to be.)

While on the subject of food, I thoroughly approved of an original idea of the Principal's to group boys in the dining hall by their eating ability. The aim was to reduce food wastages. By this arrangement, those of us who were good eaters had more food than the others. Christopher Okigbo, of blessed memory, slim and small as he was, had a reputable appetite, especially for beans and rice, and was numbered among us. Where all the food he ate went, I'll never know to this day but he remained as trim at the end of the experiment as at the beginning. He must have been endowed with extraordinary metabolism. The experiment itself was unfortunately short-lived. Perhaps some of us were gaining weight too rapidly for Mr. Simpson's comfort.

At about the time that I first went to Umuahia, there was a strike in King's College, Lagos, the most prestigious Government Secondary School in the country.[16] In the upshot three or so boys were detained and later drafted into the army, of whom one died while still in detention. In my last year in Umuahia, there was another strike in King's College. The senior class was expelled from the school. Whatever the causes of these two strikes, it would have been unthinkable for any such thing to have disturbed the serenity of life in the Umuahia of my time. It was as if we had all been put—or at least that an attempt was being made to put us—in a kind of straitjacket. I suspect that an outsider of the school would have been struck by the monotonous sameness of outlook and behaviour pattern among the boys.

I believe that the school's prefects (that I was not one of them was probably the school's loss, not mine, if you ask me), had a relatively easy time managing the boys. We were all taught to be polite to one another, but especially to our seniors, and to always answer "yes please", and even "no please". One prefect, two classes my senior, took especial pleasure in always calling me back whenever I silently passed him by to remind me of my manners. And if I didn't then say my "good morning", threatened fire and brimstone. Looking back now, I think he must have been fond of me, though it was difficult to see that at the time. Another prefect, his classmate, would give me a painful crack on the head whenever I had the effrontery to call him by his nick-name. But

[16]The March 1944 King's College strike resulted from the takeover of student dormitories by the army. Students relocated to highly inconvenient accommodation in town, and shortly afterwards wrote a petition detailing the moral, physical, and educational disadvantages of their relocation. (See 'Disturbances at King's College, Lagos: A Parliamentary Question', The National Archives, Kew. CO 583/274/ CO 583/274/; Sklar 2004: 56; Anon. 1987; Soyinka 2013)

perverse as I was, I would often call him by the forbidden name, even if sometimes under my breath, but always in the hope of somehow avoiding the punishment.

No, we were really a docile bunch of boys. How could it be otherwise when the slightest display of spirit, petulance or defiance meant a Saturday matchet parade, or an Umuahia run? A boy, who was academically one of the two or three outstanding boys of his class, was repeatedly threatened with expulsion from the school because he had a tendency to petulance. Another boy, probably the best footballer to have played for the school in my time, was actually sent packing because his general conduct was "unsatisfactory." This happened when the boy was in class four and had achieved reasonably satisfactory academic year. He had been guilty of no specific act of misconduct worthy of the name, except that from time to time he had showed more "spirit" than was acceptable. The humble writer was once, mercifully for the only time, given "six-of-the-best"[17] because I had dared to say to a prefect: "I don't care!" Incredible as it may sound, prefects had the power to punish even their own class-mates, and this (perhaps because I was never elevated to their ranks) I thoroughly disapproved of.

There may not have been much change and excitement in our daily life, but looking back on my six years in Umuahia, I now realize that they were probably the happiest years of my life. What exactly made it so, it is difficult to say. Perhaps it was the — for many of us — improved quality of our physical environment, coupled with the comradeship of other boys. The rhythm of life itself tended to be rather military: we

[17]Corporal punishment for serious offences consisting in administering six strokes of the cane, common in British and colonial schools in the early part of the twentieth century. At Umuahia, it was administered in the privacy of the principal's office.

practically went through the same motions every day. We woke up at 6 a.m. or thereabouts, and went to bed at about 9 p.m. In between those hours, we had a cold morning shower or bucket bath, had our breakfast, went to morning Assembly, then to classes. Lunch came and went, followed by a brief period of compulsory "rest" in the dormitories. A bell then summoned us to "Prep" – an hour of study and home-work, usually supervised by a master. I always looked forward to the turn of Mr. Charles Low, the Australian, as the Prep supervisor. If I had no homework to write, I would pretend to be reading a book, while most of the time I watched him leaf rapidly through whatever book had taken his fancy from the Library's shelves. It seemed incredible at the time to most of us, but Charles Low was actually reading those books, not just flipping the pages over idly. The speed at which he did so excited our wonder, and I for one, never stopped to marvel at it. He was credited with reading *The Prisoner of Zenda*, a sizeable novel and other similarly fat works, each in one "Prep" period.

After Prep, came house work, which usually consisted of grass-cutting; then sports and games. After an evening shower, we changed into more casual wear for the rest of the evening, had our evening meal, then did more or less as we pleased until bed-time. These last hours were usually occupied in individual study or hobby, or in purely comradely diversions. The boys came mostly but not exclusively from the Eastern region, including a not inconspicuous representation from the Western (British) Cameroons, then administered as an integral part of Eastern Nigeria. Academically, the Ijaw boys seemed to be the most outstanding group, and this was ascribed to their staple fish diet.[18] Whether this was really the reason, or not, there was certainly a succession

[18]Ijaw: One of the main ethnic groups of the Niger delta.

of brilliant boys who regularly came top of their classes. I recall especially three of them. Harrison, Beredugo and Alagoa.

What gives me the most pleasure when I look back on my years was the genial comradeship of other boys, whether at work or play, and the lasting friendships formed there. There was keen competition in class, but it was hardly ever rancorous. I don't think Umuahia was different in this regard from other schools then or perhaps even now. What distinguished it was that we were keenly aware that we were very lucky to be in what was undoubtedly the best school around. We had the best collection of teachers. In this respect I doff my cap unreservedly to Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha, which, in my time, did not have many graduate teachers and yet had consistently excellent academic results. To a large extent our own good results had perforce to be taken for granted seeing that, as a school, we were such a privileged lot.

Because times have changed drastically, the "old" Umuahia may be a thing permanently of the past. In the circumstances, those of us who had the good fortune to have enjoyed it when it was the only Government secondary school in Eastern Nigeria must never forget.

WILLIAM SIMPSON, O.B.E.

(Principal: December 1944 - October 1951)

By CHUKWUEMEKA IKE ('45)

William Simpson is so much a part of the history of Government College, Umuahia that I had always thought of him in terms of Umuahia and Umuahia alone until I began to dig into the records after his death. To my surprise, I discovered that he spent about 26 years (almost half of his life) in the service of Nigeria (which then included the Southern Cameroons), out of which he spent 8 years as Principal of Government College, Umuahia. Coincidentally, my years as a student at Umuahia (January 1945-August 1950) fell within his 8-year term, making me one of the lucky boys to have had the full 'Simpson impact', for which I shall always be grateful.

Mr. Simpson was born at the beginning of this century – on August 7, 1901. He had his early education at Gresham's School, Holt, in his home country, England. For reasons which I have not been able to find out, he spent two years between school and university as a tea planter in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

From tea plantation in far away Ceylon to King's College, Cambridge University. Reminiscent of the 'Rags to Riches' stories which often sound out of this planet! While in Cambridge, he established a reputation as an all-round athlete. He represented his College in the sprints and the pole vault (he once vaulted 10 feet!) He played cricket in select circles, and narrowly missed a 'blue' in Rugby football.[19] He

[19]*Blue*: Highest sporting achievement at Oxbridge, awarded only to competitors in the Annual Varsity March

was a member of the Hawks Club, which opened its doors only to people outstanding in games.

His enthusiasm for games was clearly evident during his years at Umuahia, and so was his excellence in cricket. However, not even the boy with the wildest imagination could have thought that the Simpson we knew at Umuahia was ever a sprinter, or a pole vaulter. Even his excellence in cricket was limited to batsmanship — hitting for fours rather than for the fast singles. For by the time we knew him at Umuahia he had developed an impressive pot belly which quickly earned him the nickname by which he is still fondly remembered— Dewar. (The Dewar flask appeared to have been shaped after his belly!) Some naughty boys often found one excuse or another to make him pronounce 'amabunt' during the Latin class for the fun of watching his pot belly nod as he laid the stress on -'bunt'!

One of his sons, Bob, inherited his games ability and was Captain of Cricket in his school. The other son, Tony, followed his father to King's College, Cambridge, where he had a brilliant career.

Mr. Simpson joined the Education Department of the then Southern Provinces of Nigeria in September 1927— before Government College, Umuahia was born— as Superintendent of Education. Understandably, his first posting was to King's College, Lagos, the first Government Secondary School for boys in Nigeria. Except for one month in 1933 when he served temporarily at Government College, Ibadan, he spent his first six and half years in Nigeria teaching at King's College, Lagos. In January 1929 — the year Umuahia was born—he rose to the substantive position of Housemaster, having previously acted in the position on various occasions.

Mr. Simpson's career in the Nigerian Civil Service demonstrated his versatility. From King's College he assumed the Acting Principalship of that dreaded and venerated institution—the Higher College, Yaba, then Nigeria's institution of higher learning—in June 1934. After five months at Yaba, he moved on to Provincial work. From 1935 to 1940 he traversed practically the whole of Eastern Nigeria, working at different times in Owerri, Calabar, Onitsha and Cameroons Provinces. Those were the days when civil servants were truly Nigerian in outlook and in the scope of the activities, before regionalism and later statism restricted them to their home environment.

His Provincial work was interrupted for a short while in 1940. He went back to Lagos, but on Special Duty at the Department of Lands and Survey. Early in 1941 he returned to the Provinces, as Senior Education Officer in Calabar. From Calabar he went on transfer to the Cameroons. On December 14, 1944, he was appointed Principal of Government College, Umuahia.

Now came the opportunity to run a school of his own. The Second World War (which began in 1939) marked not just the end of the first decade in the life of the College, but also the end of the first phase in its history, the phase in which the Reverend 'Keep Smiling' Fisher left indelible foot-prints on the sands of time. The College was shut down from 1940 to 1943, and the boys dispersed to various other schools, while the college premises became an internment camp for enemy aliens. Mr. Simpson had the difficult assignment of building the College up practically from scratch. It is appropriate that although he spent a quarter of a century in Nigeria he is remembered pre-eminently as Principal of Government College, Umuahia. As a leading article in the 'Eastern Outlook' of 17th June, 1954 rightly stated, "no story of post-war Umuahia can be complete without a special reference to the devoted and selfless service which Mr. William Simpson gave to the College from 1944 to 1951."

Many schools take decades to come into the limelight. Umuahia under Simpson took no time to establish an enviable reputation for all-round excellence. One man (and this is a true story!) was said to have held the school in such high esteem that when his son failed to realize his greatest ambition—to gain admission to Umuahia—he wrote to Mr. Simpson offering not only to pay the boy's entire fees for the six-year course in one instalment but to add a very generous 'jara'[20] for the Principal, if only the boy could be given a place!

And all-round sportsman himself, Mr. Simpson did all in his power to turn his boys into thorough sportsmen, not just men who always played to win. Schools which lacked the spirit of true sportsmanship (and there were such schools in which the players were brutally caned if they lost a match!) were not allowed to play against Umuahia. He would not stand undue showmanship, or playing to the gallery, in sports; I still remember how unsuccessfully I tried to suppress a giggle one morning watching him demonstrate to the whole school how NOT to box! In the days when our boxing opponents from friendly schools announced themselves as 'Bandit Kosoko' and 'Kid from Chicago', the Umuahia boy climbed into the ring as plain 'Okafor' or 'Kurubo', using his surname and relying on the power in his fists rather than on whimsical names to cow his opponent.

Mr. Simpson believed in academic brilliance, and wanted his boys to shine in all public examinations. What he did not accept was that a school was established to produce book worms. "Excessive devotion to book work is a real danger", he often

[20]*Jara*: pidgin expression deriving from the Hausa word *gyara*: extra, as in a surplus portion added by a seller to the original purchase. In this context, taken to mean 'bribe'.

reminded his boys. His famous Text Book Act[21] not only prohibited the reading of text books during the period earmarked for games in the evenings but also limited the hours when text books could be read at night. The boys were encouraged to explore the rich resources of the library in quest of fiction and other general works, to play outdoor and indoor games, and to engage in healthy hobbies. The School Certificate class was dispatched on a picnic the day preceding the first paper of the School Certificate examination to stop the boys from burying themselves in revision notes.

How successful were Mr. Simpson's measures? Throughout his tenure of office as Principal, only one boy failed the School Certificate examination, passing it in the second attempt. The College shone in games: in hockey, for instance, no team beat Umuahia, at least before my class left the College in August 1950. Glowing reports on the exemplary behaviour of his students came from different parts of the country. The experience of the first batch of Old Boys to gain admission to the then University College, Ibadan revealed one area of weakness in their education at Umuahia—they felt awkward in the presence of girls! The story was told of the Old Boy who was so bewildered when a girl called to see him in his campus room that he handed her his book of mathematical tables and fled from the room! The Old Boys, behaving like the dead rich man in the New Testament who wanted his relations on earth to be spared the horrors he was experiencing in hell,[22] rushed off a letter to Mr. Simpson, urging him to

[21]*Textbook Act:* Principal Simpson formulated the Text-Book Act in 1945. It originally stated: 'During games time, that is from five to six, nobody may be under a roof; nobody may read a text book. If you are not put down for games, go on a stroll with a friend, chat, discuss. Or make your companion a good book – a novel, a book of poems or essays. Sit under one of the many shrubs around and have a pleasant one hour.' On October 26, 1950, the principal added another clause to the Act: 'No reading during break.'

[22]Luke 16: 27–8.

expose the boys coming after them to the elusive art of cultivating female company. Mr. Simpson acted promptly. Old Boys of my generation will always remember the officially organized social evening with the women of W.T.C. Umuahia,[23] and the gallant efforts of Mr. S.O. Bisiriyu (now Dr. S.O. Biobaku) and some other masters to prepare us for our first encounter with the female sex. It was an evening that inspired our Australian master, Mr. W.C. Low, to write his famous poem, "The W.T.C. Are Here". A few lines from that poem illustrate the seriousness of our plight, and I hope my classmate and friend, Mr. C.N. Egbuchulam, does not mind my quoting these particular lines which have stuck to my memory:

Alone in the corner Egbuchulam glowers,

Regretting how Oliphant's[24] *wasted his hours.*

You don't learn from Durrell[25] *how to say it with flowers,*

The W.T.C. are here!

Notwithstanding the severe handicaps—there were no secondary schools for girls within a radius of forty miles, the nearby W.T.C. at Old Umuahia being a teacher training college for women—Mr. Simpson and his staff picked up the challenge. Through picnics, excursions, net-ball matches, and other activities they encouraged healthy relationships with the female sex, to fill the gap in the rather monastic life at Umuahia of the 1940s and early 50s.

[23]Women's Training College, Ogbanelu, Umuahia.

[24]Lancelot Oliphant, author of *Progressive English Course.*

[25]C.V. Durrell's *General Arithmetic*.

Mr. Simpson loved Umuahia so dearly that on one occasion he could not restrain himself from announcing to the whole school that the day he resigned from Government College, Umuahia he would retire from Nigeria. He could not, however, control his destiny. In October 1951, he was transferred to Enugu as Deputy Director of Education. His meritorious services at Umuahia had, happily, been recognized by the Colonial Government in June that year with the award of the O.B.E. in the King's Birthday Honours List. His second recognition came with the award of the Coronation Medal in June 1953.

For a brief part of 1952, Mr. Simpson acted as the Director of Education, Eastern Nigeria. Ill-health unfortunately cut short his career. On New Year's Day in 1954, he was invalided from the service. He and his wife (at one time a brilliant teacher of Mathematics at Umuahia) retired to Canterbury in Kent, from where they later moved to Teignmouth, Devon. There, on 26th December 1959, Mr. Simpson passed away.

When I rose to pay tribute to him at a Memorial Service organized for him in the Chapel of the Resurrection, University College, Ibadan on Sunday, 28th February, 1960 by the Ibadan Branch of the Old Boys Association, I felt the way he himself used to feel when at the end of each school year he had to bid an inevitable farewell to the outgoing students. With a trembling voice he often began by saying: "It is always hard to say goodbye . . ." I have since come to realize that although Mr. Simpson is dead, Mr. Simpson still lives. A House was named after him at the College even before he died. His popular nickname—DEWAR—was not allowed to die either! It became the name of the official magazine of Simpson House. He lives in the lives of many of us who had the good luck of passing through his hands. He lives in the tradition of all-round excellence, hard work, sportsmanship, and transparent integrity which he helped to

establish at Umuahia, the tradition which makes us, the Old Boys, proud to proclaim that we are Umuahians.

Chinua Achebe's Note:

I think that Ike is a little severe on Umuahian maladroitness in feminine engineering. Admittedly many were a little awkward in female company especially those of us from "bush schools where you sat on mud benches," to borrow R.F. Jumbo's immortal phrase. But certainly there were exceptions and Mr. Low acknowledged this in other stanzas of his famous poem, "The W.T.C. are here". My favourite stanza on Bassey (of Forcados and Calabar fame) is a case in point:

Oh where is the capon-lined belly of Bassey

A rogue with an eye for a nice female chassis

He is under the stars with a slim little lassie —

The W.T.C. are here!

UMUAHIA IN THE 1950s

By Ken Tsaro-Wiwa[26] *(54')*

As we drove that September afternoon of 1954 in the Biro (the proud five-ton truck that bore the school emblem) from the Umuahia Railway Station to the Compound at Umudike, none of us realized what a profound difference 'Umuahia' was to make to our lives. Fifty to sixty of us were admitted that year from the large numbers who had sat the entrance examination and attended the qualifying interviews. We came from near and far, from all over Eastern Nigeria and the Cameroons. Umuahia had just turned twenty-five and the Silver Jubilee celebrations had gone off the previous year. Eastern Nigeria was either self-governing or on the threshold of it. Nigeria was soon to be independent. We came from a variety of backgrounds; of different ethnic nationalities: Igbo, Efik, Ibibio, Ghana, Ijaw; sons of peasants, and of top professionals. Umuahia was the melting pot. And what a melting pot it was!

No sooner did you pass through the gates than you knew you were in a slightly different world than what you were used to, whether you came from a village or from one of the new urban places such as Port Harcourt, Enugu or Onitsha. You had a foretaste of it during the interviews. There was order, and there was law. There was no room for indolence. If, as most boys did, you had had the opportunity of attending interviews in other schools, you knew that being admitted into Umuahia was a privilege. You were reminded from the very first day that privilege came with its responsibilities.

[26]'Tired of seeing and hearing Tsaro-Wiwa misspelled and mispronounced', the author removed the 'T' from his name in 1982 (Wiwa 2010: 94).

There was no room in Umuahia for eccentricity, or individualism. 'In Unum Luceant' was the school song.[27] And it was for real.

As you held each other's hands and danced to the tune of "Toads, fags, we are toads," you began to learn Umuahia's first lesson: discipline. For the single boy who subjected ten or twelve of you, new boys, to this entertainment might well have been the smallest boy in class two. And you all obeyed him, involuntarily. You look back on it after years and wonder why you did obey him. Because in fact he had no authority over you.

He was not a prefect. He was just a Class II bloke, full of his own self-importance, a feeling which invariably was deflated if a prefect happened to turn the corner! Tradition, that was it! Another Umuahian characteristic. "Toads, fags, we are toads." "Tadpole." "Oo-in." The lowest common factor. The beginning of wisdom. Discipline, tradition. And order. The bell went off at appointed times. You had to know how many peals signified the beginning or end of what activity. Ignorance was no excuse and you learnt fast. Order. You had to go to bed at a definite time. Invariably you had no desire to sleep at that particular time. You lay in bed. It was "Lights Out".[28] You could not read a book and you were not allowed to play any pranks because the law-enforcement agency, while it did not breathe down your neck, was there all the same, omnipresent, sort of, to make sure you obeyed the rules. And it could be a nuisance, if you decided to be a nuisance too. It doled out punishment remorselessly.

[27] 'May they shine as one': the school motto, formulated by Charles Low and inspired by Fisher's original design for the school crest.

[28] *Lights Out*: at 9 p.m., all the students were required to be in bed and all the lights in the school compound were switched off or blown out for the night.

Umuahia runs. A mile round the hilly track in six minutes. God grant you a favourable wind. Or one or two hours of manual labour—detention, we called it—on Saturday after parade. While others were busy enjoying themselves.

September 1954. A.B. Cozens sat on the throne.[29]On opening day, he did a round of the dormitories, quite informally. "You are from Bori, aren't you?" he asked me. "Yes sir." I was shaking out the bright red blanket which had just been issued to all boys. The Principal was no stranger to us. We had seen him during the interviews; we were to see him every day at morning prayers, every Saturday on the parade ground when all starched out in whites, we saluted the . . . hold it . . . Union Jack and the school flag. And we were to see him again at Sunday chapel. "Go forth into the world in peace. Hold fast to that which is good. Render to no man evil for evil." Every Sunday. You dare not forget, dare you? And down the cricket nets, he made you do the cartwheel and bowl with the same motion. If you bowled into the wrong net as some clumsy ones often did, you stood a chance of having four pence subtracted from your pocket money. It was too much money to lose. We tried to bowl straight. We still try to do so.

There were a lot of precocious urchins around those early years. Mr. X taught us geography. We learnt about the Yakuts and Osmoyada. The master did not prepare his notes from the prescribed text book. So where on earth did he dictate from? We stumbled on the wretched book in the library and copied verbatim in advance. When Mr. X returned to the following classes, he was amazed to find boys completing the

[29]*A.B. Cozens:* Arthur Barry Cozens became biology master at Government College in the late 1940s. He co-wrote *New Biology for Tropical Schools* with R.H. Stone, also a master at Umuahia. He was Principal of Government College from 1952 to 1956.

sentences he so assiduously dictated. Clever boys! Mr. O. taught biology. “Fishes are aquatic.” What else could they be? The boys giggled themselves dizzy. And the master had to remind us that “Simplicity is no weakness.” “Simplicity” became a nickname for you know whom. Mr. R. taught English. But he was most interested in phonetics. “Well, Captain Smolett, what have you to say?” Complete with inflections and pauses. We laughed hilariously. “You boys do not laugh when you are taught to play football, which is as English as English pronunciation. Why do you laugh at phonetics?” One still remembers Hamman’s English Pronunciation Exercise.

A year or so later, Mr. A.K. Wareham became substantive Principal. It was the era of the dictatorship. Umuahia was gripped by an iron discipline. The lawns were most immaculately kept; the quadrangle, the playing fields. We dug a new playground, dubbed the “New Field” and were proud of our achievement. Saturday inspection took a dramatic turn as you began to realize that dirt in any nook or corner was sure to be detected. Masters and boys alike had to take duties like military assignments. It was said Mr. Wareham had fought in the Second World War and was inclined to think that the Third War would be fought at Umuahia. Thanks to the ever-smiling Mrs. Wareham, bless her, we had inter-house gardening competitions and before you knew a thing, the school compound was ablaze with the beauties of nature: bougainvillea, pride of Barbados, sunflower, roses. Boys would steal out of their beds at night to ensure that the seedlings were properly watered. Every house built its own lawn-tennis court, covering the top soil with anthill dug from nearby bushes. Soon, Umuahia was beating neighbouring schools in lawn tennis.

It was at this time that we formed a Cadet Unit. It was a serious affair, with weekly parades, military exercises, and, once a year at Easter, an annual camp at Aku in Nsukka. Three weeks of fun and hell, camped out in the bush. We marched long

distances, practiced shooting at the range, and we crowned it all with a grand parade at the battalion headquarters in Enugu. We little knew that we would soon be using those lessons in a bitter civil war. Then, lest we forget, Umuahia acquired a brand new book—the Code of Conduct. The essence of this notorious Code was summarized by its very first law: "Obey before Complain." We complained against this law when it suited us; we used it when it suited us. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.

Umuahians always passed their examinations with flying colours. But always, there was a reminder that academics were nothing. Only on Tuesday and Thursday were we allowed to read textbooks after evening prayers, before bedtime. The other nights were devoted to novels. Mr. Wareham added another innovation. Apart from the traditional outdoor games such as cricket, hockey, football and athletics which every student took mandatory part in, there was now added something called "Extra Curricular Activities." These included bicycle and car maintenance, driving, classical music appreciation and a myriad of other activities which were so much learning for us all. And finally, the senior boys had to "Dine-in-Hall" thrice a term. You learnt to have a three-course meal, using the proper cutlery etc. Everything went well until O— decided on one occasion to pocket a few groundnuts which he ate after we left the hall. This earned him everlasting derision. It was not gentlemanly! At the end of the next dining-in-hall, his pockets were carefully searched just to make sure he had not pocketed some soup!

Which reminds me of those great men of the Dining Hall. Without them, we certainly would not have been. There was "Toad," the late Mr. Gbaruko, our Chief steward. He was most popular because of the "extras" (extra meat) he doled out to

prefects and his favourites. And of course, the inimitable Mr. Ben, forever in search of "better news."He followed world events with the assiduousness of a Foreign Minister.

And of course, the late Mr. Tom, the titchy Mr. Tom, standing about four foot six high, with bulging muscles of iron. He was our most famous cook, his total responsibility being to make sure that no boy filled his pressing iron with the red-hot charcoal which Tom and his men nurtured with so much care and valued more than gold or air. Many were the battles we fought with Mr. Tom. Grievous were our losses.

The severest of our losses occurred to those boys who were unable to present themselves properly starched and stretched before the young ladies of Elelenwa, C.C.C. Uyo,[30] Queens School, Enugu, St. Kate's Nkwerre, Owerri Girls School and Ibiaku[31]. These young ladies had begun to benefit by an association with the gentlemen of Umuahia in their immaculate whites and red blazers. Multiple were the tales of woe and victory at the end of each encounter. The Debating Society was the official vehicle of contact. But for good measure, all departing students held an end-of-year-get-together. With so many schools at our beck and call, we often made lamentable choices.

All these events were faithfully recorded in the *Umuahia Times*, the hand-written school weekly, published entirely by the boys. It took a proud place beside the house magazines which each house published termly, and the school magazine, *TheUmuahian*, which also appeared termly but was professionally printed. I was editor of the *Umuahia Times*. It died a sad death when the editor-in-chief F.Y.E. Ogu asked me to withdraw an editorial 'The Men with the Golden Teeth', a protest against prefects who ate 'dodo' (plantain) while lesser mortals had to contend with plywood (fried

[30]Cornelia Connelly College, Uyo.

[31]Union Secondary School, Ibiaku.

yams). Ogu thought the authorities might not like it. I said the *Umuahia Times* was not to please the authorities. Which was true. Considering in fact that when the Principal had objected to the following libel, we had stood our grounds:

Tahiti shall rule where'er there's food

He will never leave the kitchen.

And so long as he is in the kitchen,

Plywood and G.S.B. shall reign.

G.S.B. was bread baked locally. All the boys preferred Mazi Ejidike's or Ezenwa's Bread. The *Umuahia Times* supported the boys. But the satire stood. It was sung to the tune of "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun . . ." The *Umuahia Times* to its last number bore most exciting cartoons by W.P.J.C. Onyeama. Our production technique was primitive, to say the least. But we were a great paper. Pity we were ruined by Boardroom squabbles.

Evidence of the change of times was not only available in the stubs of hair on our chins. Nor in the increasing interest in girls' schools. Nigeria was moving towards independence and Umuahia was changing with it. Each class now contained two streams and a Higher School section had been added—in the Sciences. No Umuahian wanted to study the Arts. Poor fish. The clever boys had begun to sit their School Certificate examinations at the end of the fourth year. And we were scoring phenomenal results at both O' and A' levels.[32] We even began to admit boys from other schools into

[32]Secondary school certifications in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries are awarded at both Ordinary levels and Advanced Levels. The examination for the first is usually taken at the age of 16; the Advanced Level, is more specialized subject-wise, and indispensable for entry into many universities.

the Higher School section. Umuahia had gone out on a civilizing mission. This was not without its gripes. Many of the newcomers did not know how to flush toilets. It was a tribute to them that they, too, learnt quickly. Umuahia survived this barbaric onslaught.

And survived it so well that today those little boys of September 1954 and all those they met in Umuahia or who followed them later, will now be found along with all other Umuahians fulfilling very professional roles wherever they may be. Doctors and Engineers mostly, a very few strayed into the law, business and the arts. Their honesty, competence, quick efficiency and moral rectitude are a pride to their alma mater and their nation. 'HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD!' They are a lasting testimony to a legacy which should be bequeathed in the future.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPORTS AT UMUAHIA

By G. IGBOELI ('52)

Many a time I reflect on life at Umuahia and what it was all about. Umuahia remains for many of us, the most important period of our formative years. It was certainly not just a school in the sense we regarded other schools. It was a unique institution in many ways, a unique experience and way of life. Although a variety of programmes contributed to the remarkable effectiveness of Umuahia, games and sporting activities made the enduring impression on me.

Sporting activities at Umuahia in my time certainly constituted a major part of the training programme. The school laid an important emphasis on sports for every student rather than for a select dexterous few as was done in contemporary schools. This obvious difference could be seen in the extensive playing fields laid out—we had the upper fields which could carry three football pitches, the lower field mostly for cricket but could carry two football grounds, and finally the new field. The existence of these fields meant that during the football or hockey, athletics or cricket seasons, as many as six groups cold play in one evening. In this way each able-bodied student had at least three evenings a week of sports, in addition to two physical training sessions each week. Tennis courts were numerous and they along with other indoor games served as supporting physical activities.

In our time the school authorities must have devoted a good proportion of the school's annual budget to games and sporting activities; this was certainly a justifiable investment judging from the great role which sports played in the overall development of each student.

In the case of those students who actually excelled in one or two sports Umuahia was a lot of fun. The social standing of a "sportsman" at Umuahia was a highly respected one; there was the enviable opportunity to "tour" contemporary institutions and the greatest event was the so-called Western tour. If you were in several first teams then you were out of the school for one half of the total number of weekends each term. I remember one season when in four consecutive weekends I had been at Hope Waddell, Calabar, then at the G.T.T.C., Enugu[33], for a zonal competition, then at D.M.G.S., Onitsha and finally at Nkwerre[34]. It all happened that in all four places I located and met with some close relations during our free periods. Unfortunately my parents got to hear that I was in Calabar, then Enugu, then Onitsha, then Nkwerre in so short a time and they were quite convinced that they should check with the principal on whether these were officially sanctioned trips. Of course, tours were not always packed so close together.

In fact the school, for all the emphasis it laid on sports never allowed it to interfere with students' classroom work. Indeed one of the major differences between Umuahia's emphasis on sports as compared to other schools was that more emphasis was given to the participation of all students at Umuahia while other schools concentrated on their sportsmen. At Umuahia all students had their quota of sports each week unless you had an official exemption—"the exeat"; students were grouped according to their ages and sporting ability. Each group had its captain and it was his job to ensure that each member got the required number of games per week. In our time the best players in the senior teams were in group A while group D was a group of less

[33]Government Teacher Training College, Enugu.

[34]St. Augustine's Grammar School, Nkwerre.

agile ones. However the same opportunity was given to all groups to use the fields and sporting equipment. The same applied for the junior teams.

I have gone this length to make a point: that of all activities at Umuahia, sports contributed most to sharpen the Umuahia spirit and discipline. Games at Umuahia remained a powerful tool for the development of our young minds. It was not just considered essential for our physical well-being but an important aspect of a balanced education.

The philosophy of sports at Umuahia was an integral part of the Umuahia spirit. Whereas other schools emphasized victory and went all out to admit sports boys and girls for the sole aim of making an impression, the emphasis at Umuahia was on participation. At Umuahia ours was very close to the Olympic spirit which emphasized participation rather than laurels.

For example, until Mr. G.C. Akabogu[35]came to Umuahia, soccer, like Latin was never taken seriously. We were content to play with our brother schools without counting the shame that was supposed to arise from frequent defeats. Never in history did Umuahians resort to the stubborn behaviour or tactics of a disgruntled and losing team. The game had to be played according to laid-down principles whether one was losing or winning. The decision of the umpire had to be obeyed even when it went against us. It was the spirit of the game.

In other games such as Hockey and Cricket, Umuahia was invariably the star both here in the former Eastern Region and in Nigeria as a whole. The only other school

[35] George Chukwuneke Akabogu was Latin master at Government College, Umuahia until 1961, when he became Principal of Government College, Afikpo.

that always gave us a tough time was Government Secondary School, Afikpo where Mr. Low, an Australian,[36] had established such a high standard of cricket that was not easy to beat. But in hockey, it was Umuahia all the way. The fact that Umuahians emerged the over-all winners of the Independence Hockey trophy in 1960 proves this point. We silenced every school here in the East and went on to humiliate the champions from the North and the West to deservedly win and keep that much coveted Independence trophy.

When we won, we won very decently and when we lost, we lost so gallantly and gentlemanly that observers were forced to focus on the beauty and equanimity of loss rather than on the shame it was supposed to bring. These qualities do not seem to have any place in our present day society, a fact which explains the moral decadence of our age.

In my eight years at Government College no Umuahian ever walked out of a match either as an individual or as a team. It was unheard of. This can be considered a remarkable record in comparison to contemporary schools. Of course this was understandable if you recall the story of a team that lost a football series at Umuahia and was abandoned by their coach to trek the better part of seven miles on their way back from Umuahia. This kind of punishment was unknown at Umuahia.

I remember that victory for quite a long time was sacrificed in order to ensure discipline and to maintain our philosophy. One often wondered in those days why we played football barefoot, with no knee caps and bandages; in athletics while other schools used all sorts of outfit we remained "conservative" in that respect. It took the visit, to the then Eastern Nigeria, of a Soviet International Soccer Club side to convince

[36]Umuahia's own William Charles Low, erstwhile English, Literature and House Master, who became founding principal of government Secondary School, Afikpo in 1953.

the school authorities then that, maybe Umuahians could play soccer with football boots and knee caps without a breakdown in discipline. I often resist the temptation to talk about the good old days. I believe it is conservative to do so, and that if you stay around long enough the present will always put into oblivion the memories of those good old days. Whether Umuahia has continued to use sports as a tool of education and influence is not clear to me, I have heard rumours that "things have changed since our time." To some of us our dear memories of the old school can only make us think of change for the better.

But since our time, a lot of water has passed under the bridge. We live in an age when, in the words of W.B. Yeats,

"the best lacks all conviction

And the worst is full of passionate intensity."

The Umuahia of today is very different in character and spirit from the Umuahia of yesterday. A brief visit to the school will convince anybody in doubt. The task we must set for ourselves in this year of jubilee is the revival of the Umuahia spirit. That spirit was manifested in everything that Umuahians did or said. I still remember that a class five student was suspended for one term in the late 50s for smoking during a football match against C.K.C. at Onitsha. Our sporting spirit was part and parcel of the Umuahia philosophy. To recognize sports along these traditional lines is to revive the spirit that once animated Umuahia and gave her products their distinct quality and character.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION

—A Jubilee Essay—

by Chinua Achebe ('44)

We live in revolutionary and exciting times.

Revolutionary because profound changes are taking place all around us everyday. Exciting because the possibility of greatness seems so much more within our grasp today than at any other time in our short history as a nation. It seems to me that for the first time in our struggle towards national self-realisation we have the material potentiality for transforming ourselves into a modern state and a just society.

Perhaps I should stress right away that I am talking about *potential* greatness. I must stress that because I know what an incorrigibly optimistic—even self-deluding—people we are.

The greatness I am talking about will become a reality when we have transformed ourselves by rigorous effort into a modern prosperous and just society. The most important single tool for this transformation is education. Or perhaps I should say an educated citizenry.

Therefore it is a matter for great joy that the military administration in the country embarked on a bold programme of educational reform and expansion at all levels.

Despite problems avoidable and unavoidable the king-pin of modernization—UPE—is more or less, in place.[37] Never mind the cynics who ask what all these children will do after they have had elementary education. Literacy is the right of every child in the modern world and is not to be conditional on job availability. Which is not to say that we need not plan what the children will be doing after UPE. On the contrary, because UPE is already a fact our planning for the aftermath will have to be done with the urgency of a fire brigade action.

In relation to our not so distant past these revolutionary changes in educational opportunities may almost be seen as a breach in historical continuity. But I believe that historians would caution against postulating such a breach. And I am sure they are right. Change and continuity constitute the dialectic of historical development.

And this is why it is permissible, I think, to speak from the platform of an Old Boys' Association about new developments and changes in our educational system. By definition Old Boys represent the past. What hope of meaningful contribution can they offer in the face of the sweeping momentum of rapid change?

I believe that it is precisely on account of the pace and magnitude of present changes that the need for a dialogue with past experience, with tradition, becomes particularly urgent.

[37]Universal Primary Education (UPE) launched in September 1976, made primary education compulsory for every child over the age of six. The scheme, considered a potent tool for nation building after the civil war, sought to level educational privilege and encourage women's education. The unexpected increase in enrollment rates proved a challenge and led to an overhaul of the entire Nigerian education system. See Csapo 1983; Nwangwu: 1978; Oyedeji: 1982.

Man's nature is both progressive and conservative. He grows and learns and matures. But he remains essentially the same person. Or we may put it another way: man treasures the continuity of the familiar in everyday sights and sounds but hankers also after mysteries and after juxtapositions and re-ordering of normal experience which constitute his artistic aspirations.

Let us imagine a man who lives exclusively with change, with a relentless barrage of new things, to whom everything that happens is a brand-new experience. Surely such a man would go absolutely crazy. His mind would simply come apart under the bombardment of the unfamiliar, because there would be no order and no meaning in his world.

For what we do whenever we encounter a new experience is to assign a meaning to it. And assigning a meaning to something is relating it to other things in our repertory of the known, turning it from threatening stranger to friend, giving it a familiar name. If we were unable to make this relationship we would remain in a state of permanent shock and bafflement.

This is why society conserves its history. Ignorant people like Hugh Trevor Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, may declare that there is no African history.[38] What he confuses with history is a catalogue of events and opinions printed in books. But there is also a history which a people—every people—derive from

[38]Achebe refers to Hugh Trevor-Roper's affirmation that 'perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none: there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness . . . and the darkness is not the subject of history.' (Trevor-Roper 1965: 9). Achebe's entire oeuvre, especially the early fiction dealing with the colonial clash, is driven by the desire to debunk this notion. See also Achebe: 1990.

wrestling with their own peculiar fate, from their existential struggle, and engrave in their hearts and memory—in their culture.

When our fathers seemingly broke the flow of their discourse to interject a proverb they were linking the present with the past, the problem of now to the wisdom of all time. They might be saying to you: *Don't despair* or *don't rejoice* (or whatever was appropriate), because whatever you are seeing now is not only not new; it has happened often enough in the past for your ancestors to distil from the profusion of its variations the elegant form of its essence and meaning.

In revolutionary times it is so easy to underrate the past or be impatient with tradition. And let's face it, the past can sometimes be a burden; and tradition can become a reactionary subterfuge. That is why we must speak of tradition not as an absolute and immovable necessity but as one half of an evolving dialectic—the other part being the imperative of change. But enough of generalities.

As everybody knows the Asika administration led the nation in the taking over of primary and secondary schools by the state. A lot has been said for or against that action. I believe that its best point was its recognition of all teachers as public servants with unified and improved conditions of service. Its greatest folly was to pursue uniformity to a degree where it meant imposing low standards on all schools. This was done ostensibly in the name of democracy. But one could have invoked the same democracy—and to better account—by upgrading schools with poor standards.

Building up, however, is always slower and less sensational than pulling down. Building up calls for the sobering admission that there is already in existence a base on which I will build my masterpiece, that other people have laboured meaningfully before me in the same field. Such an admission calls for humility and a sense of history.

The anti-history tendencies of that administration found its most ludicrous expression in the decision to change the names of all schools in the State. Everything became just another XY HIGH SCHOOL. I am glad we were spared that particular innovation in the end.

And it is not simply a matter of sentiment. Here was a nation with a very short history of common enterprise: and here we were zealously digging up and scattering what little foundations there were!

The most favourable view that could be taken of those events is, as I have said, that they were inspired by the democratic urge to abolish real or imagined educational privilege and secure equal treatment to all schools and all children. Such a principle would be entirely laudable. But a good principle can be vitiated by wrong practical application. I believe the right step for a government to take in the face of disparities among its educational institutions is not to reduce basic facilities all round, but to begin to introduce them where they do not exist. If, for example, there are fifty schools and only one has a library, it should build libraries in the other forty-nine. It should *not* dismantle the one library in existence.

The Observer of Benin once carried an editorial in which it called for the abolition of "privileged" schools. It was a rather confused piece of writing which began with the historical fallacy that government colleges were founded by "our past mis-rulers" for their own children and a few very bright others.

Government College, Umuahia, as we all know, was founded in 1929 by the colonial government not for the children of colonial administrators but for any child in Nigeria or the Cameroons who could pass its entrance examination. When I went there in 1944, my father was not a colonial administrator but a retired church teacher on a

pension of £30 a year. Most of my contemporaries were sons of peasants and petty traders. There was the classic case of a Cameroonian boy who walked all the way from Bamenda to Umuahia to take up his place.

It is however true that after we became an independent nation our ruling elite began to use their position to send their children to the best schools even when they did not qualify for admission. But that is another matter and a later story.

If there were indeed any educational institutions in the country that were truly centres of luxury I would not be the one to defend them. But the only luxuries mentioned in *The Observer* editorial were LIGHT, WATER, GRADUATE TEACHERS and, I believe, LIBRARIES. Now, these are not luxuries but the basic requirements of any secondary school. Fortunately the editorial concluded by calling on the government to provide these facilities for all schools. Which is why I described it as a confused piece of writing. Why abolish those schools that do have the basic requirements only to create similar facilities all round?

The problem is that we are all apt to lose our poise, our sense of balance, when we are faced with inequalities and disparities, real or imagined. We are apt to say: *Away with anything to do with the existing system. Give us an entirely new formula!*

We see the same cry, the same tendency, in the recent spate of arguments concerning university admissions. Without doubt the closing of the educational gap between different parts of this country is a national imperative which calls for bold departures and innovation. But these changes should not be embarked upon in total contravention of old and tested educational principles of selection, instruction and evaluation.

I believe that the disparity between the North and the South will not be removed by makeshift arrangements and concessions that bear on quality. The fact of the matter is that the North must learn to run pretty fast even to maintain the present disparity; to close the gap it has to sprint furiously. This is the fact we must face, the kind of truth we must be prepared to speak to each other if we truly care for the success of this country. Unfortunately there are people, even top university academics who have been prepared to play to the gallery in this matter by proposing easy and catchy solutions which boil down to mere manipulation of admission requirements.

I do not question the value of making special concessions under certain well-controlled situations to secure temporary relief. But such a measure is called a palliative not a cure. Anybody who for whatever reason prescribes easy educational pain-killers as a cure for the imbalance in the country is either a very careless doctor or an unscrupulous one. A responsible physician would attack the trouble at its very root (i.e. in elementary and secondary schools and even before school—in the homes, in the attitude of parents and of society as a whole to modern education) so that whatever palliative and remedial measures are adopted to ease the pain will not have the disastrous effect of masking the presence of the disease.

No one has yet found the perfect way to impart knowledge or to evaluate a student. These are matters for constant debate, and quite rightly so. As a third world country in a hurry to achieve many different goals at once we are absolutely right to question many traditional methods, especially those that appear too leisurely. But we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water, or education itself together with particular methodology which we may disapprove of.

I do not see how any university which introduces an ethnic sieve between its own prescribed examination and its result can become anything other than a third rate college, whatever opinion it may hold of itself. Nor do I see how a student who can only gain admission into a university behind the protection of ethnic tariff walls can be anything but a third rate student.

If Nigeria is to undergo the transformation we are embarked upon it will require a large corps of trained men and women confident in their own ability, neither seeking nor giving special favours. Nigeria can produce such people from every section of its population. But first it must instill into its youth the rigorous habit of stretching themselves to the fullest in open competition rather than seeking, like some exotic plant, the special soil and climate of a green-house.

If the present generation of Nigerians fails to launch Nigeria into the modern world it would be precisely because we have not insisted enough on fielding our first eleven; because we have not always demanded or given value for money.

A few years ago a girl from Lagos got my address from a newspaper and wrote to me at the University of Massachusetts[39] to help her gain admission to a university in the United States. She had little mathematics and less science. But she had a Federal Government scholarship to study engineering! I think that a country which can do this kind of thing to itself has probably gone beyond mere inefficiency and corruption into absolute cynicism. And that, I am afraid, is where most of the easy alternatives to academic merit being proffered today will ultimately lead.

[39]University of Massachusetts: Chinua Achebe was Visiting Professor at the university from 1972–1975.

God forbid that we should be the generation that had the resources in men and material and got so close to creating Africa's first truly modern state but frittered away the chance in parochialism, inefficiency, corruption and cynicism. There is a terrifying episode at the very end of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* where a young pilgrim having suffered and endured all the dangers and tribulations of his journey approaches heaven at last. But his salvation is not to be. He discovers to his eternal perdition that there is a way to hell even from the gates of heaven. God forbid.

[**Achebe's editorial note**: This essay, slightly modified, was first presented at the University of Lagos under the auspices of the Government College, Umuahia Old Boys Association, Lagos Branch]

FIFTY YEARS OF UMUAHIA—ITS IMPACT ON THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

By C. Ekomaru (Lower Six)

(*The prize-winning essay in a school competition organized by the Old Boys Association*)

Greatness is not a day's attainment. It is not achieved on a platter of gold, but by patience, perseverance and diligence.

Government College, Umuahia, situated in a village, Umudike, along Umuahia-IkotEkpene road has passed through fifty years of high reputation in Nigeria and the world. This is the handwork of Reverend Robert Fisher, the founder and benefactor of this great institution established in 1929. Fisher, who moulded the College into a school of traditions, served between 1928 and 1939 to give it a sound foundation. After he left the college in 1939, it soon suffered a setback when it was closed down between 1940 and 1943 and was used as an internment camp for German and Italian prisoners of war. During this period, Umuahia students were dispersed to other colleges and this had the effect of raising the level of science education in most of those schools.

The school was reopened in 1943, and a year or so later William Simpson came down from King's College, as Principal to resuscitate Umuahia. Mr. Simpson worked assiduously to keep up the standard of good education set by Reverend Robert Fisher. When he left the college in 1952 he was given a memorable send-off by way of a full-dress opera directed by Ralph Opara, a senior student.

Government College, Umuahia in its infancy was made up of a handful of students drawn from all over Nigeria and the Cameroun and it occupied a very small segment of its present size of approximately two square kilometers. Those students who

were in the college during its infancy, were taught that laziness begins with cobwebs and ends with iron chains and were not allowed to behave as they liked. School rules were strictly enforced by the Principal and that legendary disciplinarian, R.F. Jumbo.

Umuahia, has served as a cradle for many great men in all walks of life. Umuahia has not merely accumulated fifty years; it has contributed much to education and the life of this country. It has become a standard-bearer in school administration and curriculum development, which is copied by many other schools. In the civil service, which is the bedrock of the nation's administration, Umuahians have always played a strong role in the higher echelons. The secretaries of Imo and Anambra Military Governments, Messrs Moses Udebiuwa and Vincent Aniago, are Umuahians, and so was the Secretary of the East Central State Government, Mr. J.O. Ibeziako. The impact of Umuahia traditions, which are aimed at producing honest and disciplined human beings, was noticeable during the Murtala regime probes, in which no Umuahian was ever found guilty of embezzlement of public funds even though many occupied key positions in State and Federal Governments.[40]

In the legal profession, Umuahia has produced eminent jurists among whom there are Mr. Justice Aniagolu, a one-time Chief judge of Anambra State and at present, a judge of the Federal Supreme Court; Dr. Jaja Wachukwu, a one -time Federal Minister of External Affairs; Mr. Justice C.D. Onyeama, one-time judge of the World Court at

[40]General Murtala Ramat Mohammed, who overthrew the Yakubu Gowon regime on 29 July 1975, embarked on a moral and economic overhaul of society shortly afterwards, setting up judiciary panels of inquiry to examine the assets of senior officers of the Gowon regime, and dismissing with ignominy officers found guilty of corruption. Ten out of of twelve state governors were found guilty. The campaign was extended to the public civil service, with more than 10,000 public servants made redundant.

the Hague; Mr. Geoffrey Amachree, former Solicitor-General of the Federation, and Assistant Secretary of the United Nations.

Government College, Umuahia, which is noted for its special interest in the sciences, has produced quite a galaxy of illustrious scientists, amongst them Professor Donald Ekong, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Port-Harcourt; several prominent doctors like Professor C. Nwokolo; Dr. Isaac Nsolo, the Medical Adviser to the Federal Military Government; Dr. C. Mbanugo, the Ogene of Obosi and the Medical Director of St. Thomas Hospital, Enugu; Dr. J.O.J. Okezie, a physician, politician and a one-time Federal Commissioner for Agriculture; Dr. V.J. Ene, Medical Director Diobu Polyclinic, Port Harcourt; Dr. Dick Emuchay, Chairman Imo State Public Service Commission and Medical Director, Cottage Hospital, Azumini.

Umuahia has also contributed immensely in engineering, surveying and architecture by producing eminent men like Professor Fubara; Dr. Chukwukere, a metallurgist and one-time General Manager of Nigersteel Company, Emene; Mr. H. Ozigbu, the Managing Director of Ozigbu Engineering Company; Mr. DonatusOpara, Chief Engineer, Nigerian Ports Authority. These are only a few of the many Umuahians who are rendering direct and personal service to the development of Nigeria. In the field of Agriculture, Umuahia at one-time in its history tended to be self-reliant in its food requirements, in that the students were able to produce enough farm products like yam, cassava, maize, fluted pumpkin for their own needs. The interest has enabled Umuahia to be in the forefront in the production of lecturers and professors of Agriculture in Nigerian universities and other institutions, for example Professor G. Igboeli, Professor of Animal Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Mr. O.O.Uguru, of the Umudike Rural Science Centre who has written a book in Agriculture for secondary schools.

Most important, many of the great names found in the literary field were produced by Umuahia. These great writers of international repute, like Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okigbo, Elechi Amadi, I.N.C. Aniebo and Vincent Ike[41], have through their books helped to create pleasure, expose the evils of colonialism and neo-colonialism and promote the cause of African culture and civilization. Umuahia has also produced eminent journalists like Messrs. F.U. Anyiam, Dr. E.A. Ogueri, Mr. B.O.N. Eluwa, A.K. Sam-Epelle, former Director of Federal Information Service and Mr. M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu. In the arts and music, Umuahia produced the internationally eminent Professor Ben Enwonwu, and Professor Laz Ekwueme, Professor of music, University of Lagos.

In the Army, Umuahia at one-time produced the cream of the officer Corps: Lt. Col. George Kurubo, General Alex Madiebo, Lt. Col. Eze, Lt. Col. Morah, Lt. Col. Anwuna, and Lt. Col. Tim Onwuatuegwu, to mention only a few.

Many teachers, Nigerian and expatriate, who taught at Umuahia became famous in the country at large for their work or their writings—A.J. Carpenter, who wrote his famous *West African Nature Study* while at Umuahia, Mr. K.C. Murray, the father of Nigerian Antiquities; Mr. Wareham, who wrote a book on Maps; Mr. Cozens, who in cooperation with another master, Mr. Stone, wrote a biology book, Mr. E.H. Duckworth, who was the founder and for many years was editor of *Nigeria* Magazine, Mr. Justice Ohiwere; Dr. Okoi Arikpo; Professor S.O.Biobaku; Mr. Charles Ekere; Mr. G.J.Ifon,etc.

[41]Vincent Ike: The writer Chukwuemeka Ike was christened Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike, but began to omit the Christian name shortly after becoming a writer. However, it seems to have stuck, and he is known to many people by his full name.

In fact, Nigerian society has gained enormously from the contributions of Umuahians over the last fifty years.

The name 'Umuahia' is associated with academic brilliance coupled with excellent character and good discipline. Government College, Umuahia performs excellently in the School Certificate and Higher School examinations and so it produces a large number of potential candidates for the universities and these students graduate to increase the highly needed manpower in Nigeria. But the school is not only noted for its academic excellence but excels also in sports. In Nigeria today, some of the important personalities associated with the improvement and promotion of sports are products of Umuahia. Mr. Jerry Enyeazu, the Director of Sports in Imo State and a one-time coach of international fame is one example. Mr. Namseh Eno, a legal practitioner, pharmacist and one-time National Captain of Nigeria's Hockey and Cricket teams; Mr. P.O.C. Ozieh, an industrialist and a football and athletic coach are others. Many people may not know that Christopher Okigbo, a renowned poet was also one of the first Nigerians to hit a Century in cricket. Reverend Robert Fisher contributed towards the promotion of sports in the society by donating a Cup and a Shield to be competed for by the schools of the then Eastern Nigeria like Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Methodist College, Uzuakoli, Aggrey Memorial Grammar School, Arochukwu, C.K.C. Onitsha, Hope Wadell Training Institute, Calabar. The keen competition among these schools resulted in the production of eminent sportsmen in our society today.

In 1977, Government College, Umuahia won the National Football Cup for post-primary institutions in Nigeria and the football trophy for the State post-primary institutions in 1978.

Umuahia is a model in the activities of its Old Boys Association. The organization is a main force in sustaining the greatness of the institution. It has influenced the running of the school by its wise counsel to the school authorities. It has also contributed to the physical upkeep of the place by helping to erect some blocks and donating some furniture to the Dining Hall. Such activities are copied by the Old Boys' Associations of other post-primary institutions all over the Federation.

Umuahia has so made a name for itself, that the Nigerian society sees an Umuahian as a disciplined, trustworthy and responsible person. Students from other colleges see an 'Umuahian' as a model of a well-rounded and cultivated man. It is not accidental that in all the history of Umuahia there has never been any case of student riot or any serious breach of discipline, which are the order of the day in post-primary institutions in the country.

The present day Umuahians have declined somewhat from the high standards that the school used to know. This fall can be blamed on the absence of interview before boys get admitted into the College and the present population explosion of nearly two thousand students in the boarding houses. The number of students has outgrown the facilities in the college and this is making student life very difficult. The constant power failure, dry taps, bad toilet facilities and bad meals cannot permit the attainment of the ideal Umuahia.

In spite of this, Government College, Umuahia still occupies the position of a model and a giant among schools. It remains a citadel built on the solid rock of discipline, academic excellence, and sound extra-curricular activities. Within the short span of fifty years it has produced eminent scholars, writers and leaders in Nigerian and

the international community. It is to be hoped that when it celebrates its diamond jubilee, its light will be shining even brighter.

A TRIBUTE TO 'AXIOM'

By O.C. Iloeje ('59)

Axiom was a phenomenon of the fifties and sixties, an institution in his own right in the annals of Umuahia. He began when Masters used to troop in for morning Assembly, behind the Principal, sporting short sleeved shirts, khaki pairs of shorts, long hoses turned down just below the knee (with brown or black shoes to match) and a pen stuck into the space between the hose and the upper leg with just the cap showing—and looking very much like the European Principal. He ended when some younger graduates from Ibadan would come for the same Assembly wearing print jumpers over pairs of trousers and sandals. This is not to say that the entrance of the new breed had any effect on him or his tenure. By God, no! He kept to the unwritten rule in matters of colonial dress, and in everything else—in his speech, his vocabulary, his jokes, his sense of fairness, and his style,—he made his own rules and he broke them. In these other aspects, he was anti-classical, a rebel without intending to be so, a name that brought hilarious excitement to both the high and the low among the student population, and an unpredictable terror in the classrooms, during inspections, on the parade ground, and in the little room where students changed used exercise books for new ones. But above all, he was loved by everyone that passed through him.

"*Teek* for *Teek*. Alamanda for Alamanda!"

There were usually two types of notebooks issued to students which were renewed when completely and duly signed by the subject teacher. One was "thick" backed and the other was a soft backed notebook with the name "Alamanda". But you couldn't fool Axiom. With the battle cry of "*Teek* for *Teek* . . ." he would descend on the back of the offending Alamanda with the school stamp for USED with such ferocity

as if he sought to crush the conniving student who was fully materialized in the notebook.[42]

The matter ended there if he was in a good mood. If he was not, the used up notebook would find its way to a heap on the floor, followed by a whipping out of the DETENTION list into which the boy's name would be entered.

"*Ffool*. *Messss*. Detention!"

The new exercise book was also forfeited, and the boy would leave, possibly frightened, half amused by the new phonetics, quite shaken by the dramatic consequences of his little escapade, and very apprehensive of the coming Saturday morning when the Detention list would be read out—with the attendant shame of having to step out in front of the whole school.

Axiom liked to think of his class tests as the wrath of God descending on the artful dodgers and the noise makers, the sneaky ones who ate groundnuts under the desk during his classes, the mischievous menaces who found ways of making his blood boil, and the waste pipes who came to school to waste their fathers' money. With some sort of vengeance, such wraths often descended without warning. But at other times the warning was quite fair and to the point:

"Next week, next week—I bomb!"

—and with each "next week", his right hand rose one foot higher to indicate the succession of weeks. Translated into simple Queen's English the statement meant:

"I'll give you a test in two weeks' time"

[42]The student's offence was that he handed over an 'alamanda' in the hope of getting a 'teek' to replace it.

But one was made to understand that it would not be an ordinary test. It was going to be Axiom's vendetta!

The day the answer sheets would be returned, graded, was usually a fateful day. Axiom would sit on his stool by his table, glowering at the class—his eyes spitting fire—red pen in hand expecting the greedy and perennially dissatisfied "mark mongers" to come up and complain for more marks, and daring them to raise a voice with a face that radiated terror. But the desire for more marks usually overcame the terror from Axiom's face.

"Excuse me Sir"

"Yes. *Ffool*. You *wan* more marks? *Kom up*."

"Excuse me Sir, I got this one and you marked it wrong."

"Aha. Bring *eet*." (Snatch Slash Slash)

And having snatched the exercise book from the complaining boy, he would quickly cancel the old score and subtract two points. The surprised student would quickly snatch back his book, but the harm would have been done. But there was now the need to complain about the reduction from 24/30 to 22/30, which would bring another snatch, and another reduction to 20/30.

Such dramatic encounters usually did the trick, and there would be no more "monging" for marks that day.

Possibly, a boy called Aka may have done very well, with 30/30. Axiom would call for his answer book, and after taking a gleaming look at it would say:

"*EEh. O maraakwukwo*!"[43]

—not minding the fact that the subject was Latin, and that speaking in vernacular was banned in the school. He would then proceed to treat the class to a surprising flexibility of the Latin language:

Aka

Aka

Akam

Akam

Akae

Akae

Aka

By the time he got to the second "*Akae*", the whole class (minus one) would have joined him.

On one occasion, Axiom was surprisingly late to class. The boys took that as an excuse to play around and make a noise. Axiom overheard the noise on his way from the A.D. Block. The class monitor had taken down the names of the noise makers, but one rough neck whose name was on the list (and he felt, unjustifiably) had snatched the list from the monitor and had torn it. When Axiom came in, he demanded for the list. The monitor dutifully narrated what happened. The rough neck got up to defend himself, and the following dialogue ensued:

[43]'Eeh, O mara akwukwo': Igbo for 'Yes, he is intelligent.' Literally, 'Yes, he knows book!'

"Excuse me Sir. He wrote my name, and . . ."

"And you *tear* it."

"But Sir, I wasn't making any noise."

"*EEHE*,[44] and *tear* it"

"He should have . . ."

"And you *tear* it."

By this time cracks of escaping laughter were popping out from different bowed heads and covered mouths. Lungs were close to bursting.

"But Sir . . ."

"Answer me *direct*. Did you *tore* it?"

It was impossible to control anymore. The class went up in uproarious laughter. Not even the rough neck could contain himself. Axiom was beside himself with rage. He boiled and fumed but the class was out of control.

"Laughing ass", he called them. Eventually the fun cooled off, and he promptly booked the whole class on Detention. Rough neck got an additional Detention for his own unique part.

But how did the name "Axiom" all start? No one in my time seemed to know for sure. The term "axiom" rightly belongs to the discipline of Mathematics, Philosophy or Logic. Axiom's major subject was Mathematics, and rumour had it that "axiom" seemed a rather frequently used word for explaining the unexplainable.

[44]*Eehe*: Igbo expression used for emphasis.

But Axiom loved Umuahia. He loved everything Umuahian. He was devoted to the boys, to the school, and would do everything positive in the interest of both. He would have to be impossibly sick to be absent from classes. All masters were in charge of one group of boys or the other for games. But whereas some masters may occasionally be absent from games, Axiom would never be. If it was soccer, he occasionally added colour to the game by following it with a running commentary as if he was on radio. He took interest in everything Umuahia did—drama, sports etc. He hardly missed a home match against another school, and no one could miss knowing that he was there, particularly if the match was getting very tough. He would be all over the boundary line, from post to post, his "UP UMUAHIA", "NOW UMUAHIA" rising high, heavy, and urgently above five hundred voices. If an Umuahian goal seemed impossible to come, he would shake the post of the opponent's goal—to shake off the "*orumokpo*" and "juju", which must have been buried at that goalmouth to ward off goals.

On one such occasion, during a match against a mission school at the Upper Field North, he did just that. Soon afterwards, Umuahia scored the winning goal. His cries of "I *done* it! I *done* it!"—with his rising fist of victory high in the air—drowned the jubilation of the boys.

Many boys that he helped through difficult circumstances will not forget him. Many whose hearts were made lighter by his numerous jokes will always remember him. We the Old Boys of Umuahia, particularly those that passed through him, use this opportunity to wish him the best, and God's protection wherever he may be.

UMUAHIA AND SOCCER

by Chinua Achebe ('44)

The wit who described soccer as a game for gentlemen played by ruffians, and rugger as a game for ruffians played by gentlemen[45] had a point.

It was perhaps not accidental that in the early days when Umuahia paid particular attention to the cultivation of gentlemen it had a dismal soccer history, more or less. Although we had a chance at rugger we didn't really take to it. We seemed to hanker after the game made for us but usurped by barbarians!

The soccer champions of our day were C.I.C. and C.K.C, where Irish Fathers were rumoured to flog their students after every unsuccessful match, and where gifted soccer players were reputedly allowed to stay in school even if they were "yam-heads" in class, to borrow from A.B. Cozens' famous classification.

Our wistful attachment to soccer did not go entirely unrewarded. We did not lose every match. I recall a narrow victory over D.M.G.S. and another over Uzuakoli in 1948. One such occasion was immortalized by our College poet/musician, Herbert Oboli, in a poem I have forgotten except for the concluding couplet:

Thanks to Onwurah the goalie

The writer of this poem is Oboli.

One day C.I.C. came to play against Government College, at Umuahia. I remember the day very well. For some reason which I do not, however, recall the game was played in mid-morning. C.I.C. was accompanied, on account of its fame, by quite a few of their

[45] Popular adage.

Enugu fans. One of those hangers-on was broadminded enough, however, to pay Umuahia the following compliment when, miracle of miracles, Samuel Izuora scored the first goal of the match for Umuahia.

"Biali dianyi,"[46] *said the fan,*

"umu aro a ewelu trigonometri gbaa bol!"[47]

Well, whether it was trigonometry, algebra or geometry that got us that unexpected victory; or whether C.I.C. was deliberately merciful, as C.C. Momah suggests in his 'Reminiscences', it was a different story with the other soccer giant, C.K.C. This is how *Government College Umuahia Magazine*, No. 1 of 1947-48 reported our worst soccerloo at Onitsha on July 3, 1948:

> *The weather was fine and the School pressed hard and scored their first and only goal not long after the match had started. Before long the home team recovered self-confidence and equalized. Then Oparaocha was injured and the Umuahia team could not hold its own against the tactical superiority of the C.K.C. team who scored five goals during the first half. They scored five more goals in the second half. The school pressed harder towards the end of the match but it was too late. C.K.C. won by 10 goals to 1.*

Well, that was long ago. C.K.C. was to pay for it twenty years later. Fresh from its victory as schools soccer champions of the world the great C.K.C. was humbled by Umuahia in 1977. But by that time Umuahians were no longer gentlemen. Or were they?

[46]Igbo for 'Come, my friend'.

[47]'These children play football deploying trigonometry!'

Extracts from the Funeral Oration Delivered by Mr. Jerry Enyeazu on behalf of Government College, Umuahia Old Boys Association on the Burial of Mr. T. O. Amadi—2/6/79

We, the Old Boys of Government College, Umuahia, today mourn the loss of Theophilus Onyulo Amadi, plucked from us too soon, by the avid hands of death.

The late Theophilus Onyulo Amadi, "Teacher Amadi", to me and many others like me whom he brought up at Aba Government School, attended the Government College, Umuahia as a pioneer student where he soon caught the attention of the great Rev. Robert Fisher who appointed him the first Senior Prefect of Government College, Umuahia.

Mr. Amadi was a great disciplinarian, a gentleman, a great and successful teacher, a devoted husband and father. From a humble beginning he achieved greatness through endeavour and attained it for himself and for us all. Though we shed tears of woe, we are cheered by the fact that our school captain, now departed, was a true Umuahian, who gave of his best in his life time, and so, earned recognition from friend and foe alike. And far from leaving us hopeless, his death should direct our gaze to his life so richly imbued with the positive values of hard work, perseverance, determination, magnanimity and humility.

To Mrs. Amadi, the children and relatives of our departed Theophilus Onyulo Amadi, who, like us, are in deep grief today we wish to recall the words of the master orator, Cicero, who said that it is foolish to tear ones hair in grief as through sorrow would be made less by baldness.

What is gone and what is past help, they say, should be past grief. We pray that Almighty God will give the family the courage to withstand this shock. Accept our

deepest sympathies. To the good people of Okpala and late Teacher Amadi's bossom friends, we offer special condolences.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

Ebizies at Umuahia

I forward herewith short biographies of members of Ebizie's family who passed through Government College, Umuahia in the recent past.

1. **Engr. Michael Okechukwu Ebizie**

   Attended Umuahia Government College from 1938-1940 i.e. till it was closed down as a result of World War II now referred to as Hitler's War 1939-1945, and of House 3 now Fisher House. Completed Secondary Education at D.M.G.S, Onitsha 1940-43. Engr. Ebizie later studied in London University and obtained B.sc. Engr. Lond. in Civil Engineering. Engr. M.O. Ebizie served in the Ministry of Works and Housing in various stations as Provincial Engineer retiring voluntarily in 1978 as Assistant Chief Engineer after thirty-four years service as a civil servant. Engr. M.O. Ebizie is a member, Nigerian Society of Engineers, Registered Civil Engineer (Coren). He is at present Chief Engineer, Works Department, AlvanIkoku College of Education, Owerri and a staunch member of the Owerri Branch of Umuahia Government College Old Boys Association.

2. **Nnaemeka C. Ebizie** was a student of Government College, Umuahia from 1964-67. Like many youths of his age, he gave his life during the civil war. He lost his life in the Ogidi-Umunachi Sector in 1969. While at Umuahia, Nnaemeka was a keen sportsman of Wareham and excelled in Pole Vaulting. Late N.C. Ebizie was the first son of Engr. M.O. Ebizie. May his soul rest in peace in his unknown grave.

3. **Dr. A.O. Ebizie** was a student of Government College, Umuahia from 1965-67 and completed his secondary education at Umuahia in 1970-71 after the civil war. Dr. Ebizie graduated M.B., B.S. University of Nigeria, Nsukka, June 1978 and is now doing NYSC[48] as a Medical Director in the Rivers State. While at Umuahia, Anele Ebizie, as he was popularly known, was Editor of the College Newsletter or Magazine. Anele Ebizie is keen on creative writing and has appeared in Okike and in *Time Magazine* 'Letters to Editor' to mention a few. Dr. A. O. Ebizie is the second son of Engr. M.O. Ebizie and was a member of School house at Government College, Umuahia.
4. Ugorji I.U. Ebizie—Government College, Umuahia 1970-73. Ugorji was in Fisher House and developed to be a very fast Sprinter and won trophies in 100 and 200 metres respectively. He was in the college team and represented the college in Sprints and Relay races. Ugorji graduated B.Sc. Engr. U.N.N.[49], June 1978. He did NYSC in Lagos and Lokoja. Ugorji is presently with Imo State Housing Corporation, Owerri, as an Executive Engineer. While at Nsukka, Ugorji was Secretary of GCUOBA 1974-75. Ugorji is the third son of Engr. M.O. Ebizie.
5. Jones A. Ebizie—1970-74. Jones Ebizie was in New House now Erekosima of Government College, Umuahia. J. Ebizie distinguished himself as long and middle distance runner. He was a prize winner in 800 metres 1973-74 and was in the college team. J. Ebizie trained as a teacher and is now doing a N.C.E.[50]

[48]National Youth Service Corps.

[49]University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

[50]Nigeria Certificate in Education.

Teachers course in ATTC[51] or College of Education, Sokoto, majoring in Physics and Maths. J.Ebizie is the first cousin of Engr. M.O. Ebizie.

6. **Chijioke O. Ebizie**—Government College, Umuahia 1974-78. He was in School House and was later dumped in the so-called "Extension". Chiji was quite keen in sports and other school activities but he was hampered by a leg injury from which he has recovered. Chijioke is now a second year Engineering student of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Chiji is the fourth and last son (not last child) of Engr. M.O. Ebizie.

   The Ebizies hail from Umuanunu-Nsu in Mbano L.G.A. For a span of forty years 1938-78, the Ebizies have been intimately attached to Government College, Umuahia to which they owe a lot. WE have made our contributions here and there to our Alma Mater as individuals and we thank God for His small mercies. I hope this is not the last you will hear of the Ebizies and Umuahia though things are not what they used to be with Umuahia.

   "In Unum Luceant" – Up Umuahia!

(M.O. Ebizie)

[Chinua Achebe's Editorial Note]: (We think this is a fine record—Editor)

Sir,

With utmost humility I write to ask for a copy of the special edition of *The Umuahian* soon to be launched during the Golden Jubilee activities.

[51]Advanced Teacher Training College.

I was offered admission to the school on two occasions in 1964/65 but for the demise of my father when I was four the chances of furthering my education were slim.

I was amongst the very few offered admission from Nsukka Zone after my first school leaving certificate examination in 1961 which I passed with distinction.

I wish the school uninterrupted excellence.

Yours faithfully,

Charlie A.O. Okafor,

54B Oguta Road

Onitsha

[Chinua Achebe's Editorial Note]: *(A copy of *The Umuahian* is on its way to you with the compliments of the Old Boys—Editor)

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Warmest best wishes to

Government College Umuahia

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SCHOOL ANTHEM

By EDWARD CHUKUKERE ('46)

1. We lift our voice to thee, O Lord
   To Thee we sing with one accord
   To grant us through Thy Son Adored
   The will to shine as one.

2. From morning till the approach of Night
   With humble minds, with all our might
   We seek this gift which is Thy Light
   The will to shine as one.

3. As all of us, or black or white
   Beseech Thee now us to unite
   That all may seek this gift Thy Light
   The will to shine as one.

4. We beg thee now to show the way
   That all of us may kneel and pray
   And see and keep from day to day
   The will to shine as one.

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