

Eulogy to Nnenna Agnes Nnamani

By

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Coming out here this morning I was invited to greet my people. But why an eulogy? Why a tribute? Tribute by who and to whom? Would I at 55 pay tribute to Nnenna, 47? Or would a living Nnenna pay tribute to me? Would Chima or Chichi pay tribute to their mother in the presence of their living father, or out here paying tribute to their father in the presence of their living mother?

But who can question the paradox of life? Who can question life's irony? Who can question the tragic comedy inherent in the vagaries of human life? Who can question how the Lord dispenses His privileges and benevolence? As the great Archbishop Chukwuma would say, *mysterious tremendum et facinrance (the mystery of the Lord is tremendous and fascinating)*.

I was not tongue-tied when I met the Ohafia damsel 30 years ago. So I would not be tongue-tied today as we say goodbye to her. 30 years ago when I ran into the most beautiful woman in the world. As they would say today, I had the flow and swags and the words came out in staccato and promises to impress.

Today in the summer of my youth, the words refuse to flow, dampened and with the temperance of age, realism, the concatenations of life, and a body battered by the tempestuous storms of life's arduous journey.

In the beginning, she was not called Nnenna. I called her ‘AGINESI’, but she always protested and it was ‘*Ichowakwalam...aham bu ÁGNES*’, and I would say ‘*Ok AGNES*’, and somehow we settled for NNENNA.

I met Agnes on a glorious afternoon at Ohafia where I was serving as a Youth Corps doctor with official designation as Local Government Health Officer. I remember that day that I saw her on the road at Akanu heading towards Ebem Ohafia. I told the driver called Ghana-man that he should stop, that I had seen the most beautiful woman in the world. Ghana-man told me as I continued asking him to stop, ‘*Ngbaa break, anyi ga-enwe accident*’. That memory stayed with me and more or less haunted me.

I was consoled by the words of **John Burroughs** (1837–1921), in *Waiting*:

*Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,
For lo! my own shall come to me.*

*I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.*

As my mother Elizabeth would say: *Chimaroke nkem, nyem ya*. I instinctively knew that if I ever set eyes on her again she will be my wife.

Few weeks later when I again saw this beautiful lady sitting in front of her home with her friends and relatives on an evening dusk chatting away, I told Ghana-man to stop, that this time we won’t miss this opportunity. Ghana-man cautioned me to no avail and asked if I was really sure, because it looked like the mother was also sitting there with

them. Like in the faint echo of the spiritual, I said I would go; *yes I would go to see what the end would be.*

We stopped the car, alighted and approached. Agnes and her group ran into the house and we continued our approach and advance and now accosted her mom. She said Ghana-man, what is the purpose of this visit this evening? Ghana-man said *well, this is my oga, a young doctor at the Local Government, he wants to see your daughter Agnes.* And she blew us off and of course the price was too much, hence any humiliation and embarrassment was well worth it. And Ghana-man said to Mama, *well, Nne, such a young man is looking for your young sapling maiden and you are asking why? You might as well keep her and let us go.* As we took our leave humbled and with my tail tucked in-between my legs, the young girls burst into laughter but we were not embarrassed and not humiliated. It was all worth the price.

At this point, Mama, also an Nnenna, changed her mind and said, *ok, whatever you want to tell her, tell her here.* And she summoned her daughter and at this juncture, all I could mutter to her was my name and the business of my sojourn at Ohafia. Thereafter, I smiled all the way home like a little kid from a candy store. And the rest, they say, is history.

When I left my youth service and proceeded for my specialization and sub-specialization training, Agnes tactfully handed to me her goodbye gift, a fine picture of her. In the hustle and bustle to integrate into the medical profession in America, at down times and up times I would bring out her picture and look at it and my sisters would make fun at me. But for me any embarrassment was well worth it for the price of Agnes.

In the second year of my residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology, I was to undertake a perilous journey to Canada on a Thanksgiving Day to “bring” her into the United States, a move that would have aborted my academic and social ascent. Prior to that, her uncle, a medical doctor, and my doctor colleagues had cautioned me that she had a variant of

sickle cell *hemoglobinopathy* of the *thalassemia* type. But that was not to deter me as I was being trained as a specialist in Obstetrics and Gynecology with sub-specialization in maternal and fetal medicine and high risk obstetrics, also with post-doc training in molecular biology and tissue cytology. My rationalization was that God was training me to take care of Agnes, now Nnenna.

Now again in the summer of my youth, I have been able to situate the life and times of the mother of my children and wife Nnenna Nnamani within the realms of Igbo mythology. Igbo mythology in the practical demonstration of the trinity of Igbo Character, Njepu –Travel, Igbambo – Struggle, Akpauche – The court of reason.

So as I pay tribute to her today, I pay tribute to her progenitors, the Ohafia Abam sub-ethnic nation of the Igbo. Indeed, I have tried to theorize and deconstruct the strength, character and myth of the Ohafia woman which was part of my inspiration to come back to Nkanu land, my own people of Nkanu sub-ethnic nation with one of their daughters. In Ohafia, the Ohafia woman is Queen, the Ohafia woman is also King. As her man went out for work as a warrior and mercenary, she was not sure when and if he would come back. It is thus predictable that through natural evolution, the Ohafia woman would be father, mother, sister, brother, hunter and gatherer. Thus, a refrain as in the last chapter of Proverbs;

10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. 12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. 13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. 14 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. 15 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. 16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. 17 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. 18 She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. 19 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. 20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. 22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. 24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles

unto the merchant. 25 Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. 26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. 27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. 28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. 29 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. 30 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

The story continues ...

An alpha female from the great Ohafia Abam clan meets and alpha male from the great Nkanu nation, an Nkanu Lion, a double lion at that, and a swashbuckling lioness from Ohafia, in the wilderness of the land of Abraham Lincoln. Again, the rest is history.

Through Agnes, I salute all the great women of Ohafia Abam clan, the warriors and custodians of the brute strength of the Igbo nation; I salute *the Nnennas, the Achamas, the Mmia Nnayas, the Oyidiyas, the Ikodiyas, the Ularis, the Afos*. I thank them for contributing and strengthening the genealogy of my people, the Nkanu sub-ethnic nation.

At 55 today, 30 years later, I submit and pay homage and respect to that great Ohafia lioness, Agnes Nnamani, *Odibeze, Achama, Achalugonwaanyi, Ugoeze, Omalicha nwa, Omauma-asa-arua, Elelebe-ejehi-oru, Ifenkili, Ego onyibo*. I acknowledge her; I hold her in high esteem and submit to her acclaim. I associate with the aplomb and celebration of her role in this journey of life. I understand and salute her independence, her strive, her hardwork, her ambition, her dreams, her control and her marriage philosophy. I thank her for the time, for the sacrifices and selflessness. I look at my son Chimaroke Ferguson Nnamani, I say thank you Nnenna, Dalu, Imee. I look at my daughter Chinero Yobachi Nnamani, I say Nnenna, Dalu, Imee, tushia. For Nina, Stacy Nnamani, I say thank you. If you look at the brochure and you see Nina and Chichi and you see the resplendent in queen dresses, you would agree with me that there is no other woman in the world that will dress and groom their children the way she did. As it is common in America to subject our children to the rigors of hair braiding that will last for weeks, she could

not subject her children to that, but found ways to put together on a daily basis ribbon in different hairstyles and buns.

There she lies today, transformed from an Ohafia amazon to an Nkanu matriarch. From a young damsel to a mother, she exits to the great ballad of Frank Sinatra, '*I Did It My Way*'. She indeed did it her way.