



Mama Tee Oral History Transcript for IROKO 'Home from Home' project 2022 – 2024



Introduction

My name is Adetokunbo Fabikun, and everybody calls me Tee, some Mama Tee, Aunty Tee and I think it started by a lot of people thinking that Adetokunbo is too much of a tongue twister. So they just put up the Tee. Any Nigerian will call me Adetokunbo, so it is just the Tee at the beginning. And it's funny that quite a lot of people call me Tee, Tee, Tee, Mama Tee, Aunty Tee, that's just it. I'm getting used to it and I love it. That's my name. I'm 74. I tell people I'm only 16 and I've never been kissed. Never gone on a date so that makes me tend to get a lot of offers. For people to take me on my first date. So that's it.

Growing up in Nigeria

I was born in Lagos, Nigeria. I'm from Lagos, my parents are from Lagos. Then I lived in Lagos. But having said that I have lived all over Nigeria. So that's me. Growing up in Nigeria, I went to school in Nigeria. I would say that I was a privileged child. My parents were both educated. My father used to work at the Ministry of Labour as a Labour Commissioner. So beautiful doors were open. And I went to very good schools in Nigeria.

In my family, we were very beautiful lot. I'm immediately after 3 brothers. So growing up I was more or less a tom boy. And I was very, very, skinny. And that time, my brothers wanted to tell

me off. They used to call me mosquito. Because I was so skinny. I was told that I should be running because it was only the wind that would be flying me all over the place.

But it was a nice..going back. My father was an only child. So I think in a way, that is why we were all spoilt. Because he had us....My grandmother, that is my father's Mum , she was very good. Very broad minded. Very, very broad minded. She is a typical Ogoshun. That is my grandmother. She doesn't tolerate any stupidity. Especially from men. She doesn't. She would tell us grandchildren. Don't take any nonsense from these men. Don't. At least I always remember two things from her. No matter how bad my grandmother told me. No matter how annoyed you are, if your husband offers you money, take it and put it in your pocket. Continue to be annoyed. But because once you forgive him, he won't give you the money. The money is gone forever. So I have told a lot of my friends that, you know what, when you quarrel with your husband and he gives you money to appease you. Take it. Because once you smile at him again. The money is gone forever. Then they will all start laughing. They will say when did you learn this. I say my Granny told me. That's why I'm sharing it.

Education.

For my school days, I was in Ibadan, the western part of Nigeria, then we moved again back to Lagos and while I was in Lagos I schooled atAbbotts Grammar School. Then I went to the University of Lagos. That is where I did my education. In a nutshell that is the educational part.

Then I started teaching because I love children. So, I have been teaching. My teaching life, I went to the northern Part of Nigeria in Kano. I did my teaching first of all at a boy's school. Which was where I did my NYC in I think it was... 72, 70' something. I've forgotten. Then I taught in Samphina College School for many years, which I love. I love living in Kano. Kano is very beautiful place. I love living in Kano. It was a convent that I was teaching at. A girl's secondary school. I loved it. I enjoyed it. But unfortunately, I had to leave Nigeria because of the Maitatsine uprising which is well known now as Boko Haram. The Maitatsine at that time was the starter point. This was years ago. In 83/84 I don't know. But that is when I left Kano.

Emigrating to England

So that is when I moved back to Lagos and emigrated to England. First of all, I when I got married. I when I got married, my husband was an accountant based in Bradford. That is where we were. In Bradford I had my son. But like every different case to attend. But at that time, it was the period of oil boom in Nigeria. So there was money. When my marriage ended, I thought Oh, there was more money in Nigeria then here. So I just went back home. So that was it.

I went into all sort of business. You'll find that a lot of people, a lot of women, you don't just rely on ...I would say a lot of African women not just Nigerian women, where you have one job, one main job, there is a tendency to always have something else. Even when I was teaching, I would come to England, I would come to London after 6pm on Friday after school, buy a few things and take them back and by Monday morning I'm back at school teaching. They would say Mrs Fabikun how was your weekend? I would just laugh and say it was nice.....Apart from those who would know what I was doing.....And I was doing that throughout.

So then, when I moved back to Lagos. I didn't teach I went into insurance. I worked at an insurance company. Meanwhile, while I was doing that, I had another business, that I was doing. As a say, African women, we love having extra money. And then by then I had become a single parent. And my son was attending a very expensive school. So I must always be enough

money to look after that bit. And every year we were always travelling. That is how that one went. Then when my son got to a certain age. I just decided that this is the time for him to go back to England. And then he came. Meanwhile the Dad had always been living in England, in Bradford. So, he went to live with his father. And something just happened, so I had to move again back to England. When I moved back to London, then I decided to stay in London, not outside London, because number one, the memories I had of Bradford were not very good. So I just said no. It's best for me to just stay in London and stayed in London.

Settling in Newham

I got a job. Actually, I did many jobs in London. Meanwhile, I went for training as a teacher so as to continue to be a teacher. So then I did that. When I applied to Newham College and I became one of the teachers, we were community teachers, teaching people how to use the computer. And I did that for many years. And it was nice then. Towards the tail end of my years at the Newham College. I had breast cancer. So, when I had breast cancer. Although I got all the support I had. The fund dried up at Newham College so I couldn't continue. But having said that, until I had breast cancer, I had never heard of anyone who had survived breast cancer. And I thought oh my God. I had to ask my cancer nurse, that I would like to see one person that has survived breast cancer and she said she would. I asked if there are people that survived it and she said yes. I just want to see one person, not two or three, just one.

Surviving Cancer/New beginnings

That was how I met the person, and I was so happy that I grabbed and hugged her. I had a prayer, just a simple prayer, that God if I survive this, I want other people to use me. So after my cancer journey, I started with another friend with three friends actually. The new beginnings. The new beginnings was a thing about, there is life after cancer. A lot of people think that, as soon as they hear about cancer, they think that death is the next one but no, we wanted to tell them that there is life after. We were going to schools, we were going to, especially we went to the deaf community, we went to churches, we were going everywhere, and people were surprised. It is a fact a lot of people that they had never seen or met people with breast cancer.

Carpenters Estate

I have lived at the Carpenters Estate for more than twenty years now. I am bit biased about Carpenters Estate because I love my estate. I love living here. The people were very warm. They were accepting. The residents were nice. Because the residents were nice to me. I felt love. So it was home. You know what I mean? It was home to me. And the estate happens to be a TMO. TMO means a Tenant Management Organisation. When I got to the estate, I didn't know what it meant. I started asking questions. When we were told what it meant. I attended the meetings, I attended the trainings, what you want to do and everything. There are many trainings. Then I realised that, the government cannot do everything for us. at the end of the day, staff will go home, we are the ones living on the estate. It is how we want our homes to be like. The duty is on us to do it. So I joined the board of the TMO, that is the Carpenters TMO...I joined the board. When I joined the board, the first thing we should do is, we had a room that we should buy computers. There were quite lot of people that were not working in Stratford as a whole. East London is supposed to be the lowest of the low in income. We purchased computers. Got a few funding. And then we started trying to teach and encourage residents to learn how to use the computer to be able to update their skills, to be able to update their CVs too and then search for a job.

From there we got Newham College to work with us on the estate. Actually, that was how I became a community teacher. .By working with.... Because I was posted by the College. Because since you live there, you'd better do it. And then later on in the course of the journey, the Estate applied for funding. We became a wired-up estate. A few years ago, the government wanted to see the effect of the internet on low-income people. Because we had the computer room, it was very easy that we became the only estate in London and got the of money. Quite a lot sum of money. To the extent that we were able to have our own TV station. We had free internet facilities for everyone on the estate. We had our own local celebrities. So all you have to do, if you had an idea. You could go to the crew. And then they work with it .And the fact they know you, it would be videoed, and we will be sitting down in at home, and we'd be watching ahh, you on the television on the estate. . So which was very good. That thing it brought everyone together. And so you were telling me we were watching your yesterdayWe didn't have to go to ITV, before we can see stars. We have stars within us. So it brought about a lot of love in the estate.

And the children will come to the computer room, immediately after school. They would come to the compute room to play. And at that time t I had about 25 computers, so it was a big thing. They would come there immediately after school. Actually, they made it into 5 -6 for under 7 and the by 8 O clock the teenagers would come. Thereby we were able to kill two birds with one stone, that's the boys, the children, the off the street. So, they were not able to be influenced. We got them off the street. Many times, you would find that there about 50 teenagers in the computer room, jostling and making and having fun. And they are there. They are not on drugs on the outside. That was the good part about it. And not only that, but we were able to encourage because we had volunteers working in the computer room. So we were able to involve the children to see themselves as brothers and not as rivals.

So there was no rivalry or gang war on Carpenters Estate. Even until now. There is still no gang war on Carpenters Estate. And so we had such a beautiful relationship on the estate that until I think it was 2006, when the council decided that they wanted to regenerate the estate and that was when a lot of things started.

Learning about Homelessness

Actually, the starting of Carpenters Café, it started in 2006. 2006 Christmas. I was just at home when a friend came to say what are you doing at home? And said Crisis. I had never heard of Crisis before. Crisis had an event or another. Okay let's go. She even thought it was a paid job. So when we got there, we went and we learnt that it was a Christmas shelter. Crisis will have, they will open their doors to the homeless families. Yes all of us have seen a homeless, one there, one there. On that day I got there, there were about 3000. I was so surprised. Then we were told It was about a voluntary job. I thought yes, ,okay I want to learn about this. I never thought, I never thought that one person there, one person there will add up. Until I got there. The bad idea we all have is to think is that homeless people are all druggies. No! I learned two things that day in December 2006. That not all homeless people are homeless as a result of drugs, they became druggies because of homelessness. I meet businesspeople, who fell on hard times. For them to bare the disgrace and everything that was there, they turned to drugs.

So there it is. Actually, that day I was so surprised. I started seeing everybody and anybody especially the homeless, with another eye.. With my depth of understanding. I could see that,

Oh my God, this was a thing beyond. So when that thing happened, I went back to the TMO board to say that I want to start so and so. And of course everyone started laughing. They started saying 'oh Tee you and your things, you've started...But then I got people saying Tee, anytime you are ready, I will be a driver, anytime you are ready I will be volunteer, anytime you are ready I will be collecting for you. Anytime you are ready. So I already had that. So I was so happy I started writing letters all over, all over the whole place. So many no's, I'm sorry we can't do this, we can't do that. Until I got a call from Peter Metcalf. He was one of the founders of Pret a Manger. He called and said 'Is that Tee? Yes please. I said yes. He said 'when are you starting? I said starting what? He said starting feeding. I said oh my God! And that was how Mr Metcalf became a mentor. And he would be calling and telling us step by step, what to do, And that was how Carpenters Café started.

The only thing I tell people is that, you know Carpenters Estate is not far from Stratford Centre. I don't like going to Stratford Centre because when I go there you will be hearing Mama Tee, Mama Tee. So is it those that we taught how to use the computer that started work, is it the ones we are feeding. Or it is the one that....You know It is so involving. But it's part of life. I enjoy it. I tell people that I have so many children and so many grandchildren. You know those teenagers that used to here a lot have become parents and they come and introduce their children to me. I will see that as a honour.

Being the Change

I will think that to me, about the changes I want to see in the community, in my home, in everything. I tell people that if we don't look after these children. Let me digress a bit. When we started the computer room, I was saying that we must do something for the teenagers, we must do something for them. I would be getting oh no.....I said look if we don't do something for them today, we will be getting sleepless nights tomorrow. I believe that the devil will find work for idle hands. If they don't do something, something will be going into them. So luckily for me, a lot of the older mothers agreed. And we all worked together to occupy their children, so that there was a limit to the outside influence. I'm not saying that there wasn't any, but there was a limit. And they all know at that time. I gave them my phone number. All you have to do is just call me. I said anytime you need me, I will be there. They said Tee, we know you will be there. So when you make yourself available, and you take that first step of doing it. Instead of running down everything, that is a negative approach. So you take the positive approach, and you will be surprised that people will help you.

Celebrating Legacy

How do I celebrate my legacy? Let me tell another story. You know we Africans we love story. There was an incident at a meeting and I wanted to ask them to express caution. So I told them, you know what, this incident, reminds me of a proverb in my language. I will first tell the proverb and then give I will interpret it.....The interpretation is that the person whose head is used to crack a coconut will never eat out of it. Everybody laughed. Everybody! But they got the meaning of the proverb. And for a very longtime, for years afterwards, when we want to be discussing anything and we want to say let us be cautious about this...They will say "you remember the proverb about the head and the coconut.' So let us think twice about this. And so many other proverbs that I have taught in the community. They will tease me. They will say another coconut. I will say yes, another coconut. That is me telling the whole world that I am from Nigeria. Yes, I am British, yes I have so many children from so many diverse roots. There

is this book that says, Black and White makes beautiful music, so if we all work together, we will become a beautiful community.

End

All errors and omissions excepted.