

My Holiday

After finishing my GCSE's I was aware that my summer holidays would start earlier than every body else's and I'd decided quite a while back that this summer I was going to go on holiday- I just didn't know where. A couple of opportunities had aroused; a week summer school in Cambridge would have given me an insight into university life and whether I could stand the large percentage of upper class people, however, my tutor forgot to send off the application form

I'm four weeks into my holiday and I still don't have an actual destination. My Dad has told me and my sister several times about an exchange trip to Nigeria, organised by Cornerstone Fellowship from his office but we didn't seem to take notice and it just stayed in the back of my mind. We were planning a family holiday to 'Spain' but that never took off. Six days before the trip to Nigeria was meant to take place, the opportunity to go with the group came that our place could be arranged. (Thanks to Mr Joseph and sister Keriann) Now the only problem was getting tickets on the same plane that everyone else was getting, but Dad sorted everything out.

I don't think it ever actually hit me that I was going to Nigeria, or maybe I've just learnt to be a lot calmer about everything- one of the signs of my ever-growing 'maturity' (and the moustache everybody seems to think I've grown while away). But at no point was I nervous, or too much excited. As we checked in our bags I looked around trying to figure out who was actually travelling with us, turns out we wouldn't really get to meet them for another eight hours. Because my sister and I signed on late we had seats slightly distant from the rest of the group and so had only each other for company.

It was boiling hot in the airplane and there was very little space, making it uncomfortable. I remember the very loud and active boy behind me, of which I now know as Feyi Da Silva, making a joke about us not being in Nigeria yet. My sister and I laughing when the power turned off and he screamed 'NEPA don't take light o'. Over an hour on the plane and we still hadn't moved, when the plane finally took off, the journey was pretty decent. I watched a couple of films, ate the meals and before I knew it we were in Nigeria.

When we arrived in Nigeria, after checking in and getting our bags, we moved outside to wait for the coach. I can distinctly remember tasting the air when I got out of the airport. It was so humid and stuck to my skin. It made me come to the stupid conclusion that Nigerians don't need cream because the air is enough to moisturise their skin.

For me the first coach journey to Babcock defined the holiday. We were all amazed by the lawlessness on the roads and the amount of grafters that would try to sell you anything, in the comfort of your own vehicle - it felt like convenience shopping- but we weren't allowed to buy anything, to be on the safe side. We cracked so many jokes that by the time we'd gotten to Babcock, names of individuals in the group were just a formality. We spent the first two days just in and around campus, settling in and getting to routine or perhaps to climatize us to our new country. Some people probably found it boring but those were the days I spent getting to know everybody

and learnt more about the fellowship and seventh day Adventists. It was a Babcock student that made me realise I had just left home to go somewhere with strangers and I hadn't a clue what I was doing. Then came the 'schedule', which I lost like few times, but let me know what I would be doing with my time in Nigeria.

Our first excursion took us into the town of Shagamu - made to sound legendary by our new friends from Babcock. Unfortunately it wasn't that part we were visiting, but a special needs school. We were given presents to give to the children and were supposed to have a one-on-one session, which never happened. Some children weren't too happy with the presents they were given- but socks don't often make too good a present. Some people were taught the signs for their names; I remember the children laughing after signing Fola's name in accordance with his big hair. After a short stay at the special needs centre, we were taken back to campus.

Breakfast was always a tricky subject. Often the choices were simple; cereal with powdered milk, bread- sometimes accompanied by egg and occasionally the choice between moi moi and akara. I can say that breakfast wasn't the best part of my trip, but the good company around the breakfast table, often Seyi, Dami, David, Junior and co. more than made up for the food.

Our next excursion was to visit the king of Osun state. Hmm, this began with a never-ending four hour journey, in which my sister, often accompanied by Oyin, decided they would use this journey to practise for the next series of the X-factor. After falling asleep countless times and a few jokes and laughs we finally reached our destination. The reception received on arrival more than made up for the cramped journey, although at the time I was too tired to appreciate the scale of the ceremony.

After being welcomed by everybody, we were given the seats the elders were originally sitting on and we watched everybody, including the older men and women, prostrate for the king. We then got up and, led by Feyi, performed a song we had learnt the day before. After this we went back to sit down and then one by one, introduced ourselves to the king. I told the king that I never knew where I was from in Ekiti State, not knowing that Ayetoro is a part of Ekiti state, which is quite unique because of the different towns in one state. After introducing ourselves, the king gave us a speech, which included ancient Yoruba superstitions and a plea, telling us that our people in Nigeria need us and this is our home.

That seemed to be the theme of the trip, for us to come back and make Nigeria better. However, they never actually told us how we could make a difference. Sure, I could come back (hopefully richer), but in Nigeria's current state, what could I do besides give money which presently, I haven't got.

Anyway, after the speech, we entered the king's house. A couple of people, including Tobi and my sister, thought it would be fun to sit on the king's throne and take pictures - so lucky they didn't. We were informed that for someone to sit on the king's throne is seen as a taboo. We're grasping the tradition and our culture - one of the main objectives of this trip. After drinks and a couple of pictures with the king, we were on our way home- but not before I was released from the toilet, which strangely only unlocks from the outside.

This time round lunch was packed. Usually we would eat lunch where we ate all our meals, at the VC's lodge. Lunch, thankfully, was usually a lot better than breakfast; but my encounters with yam porridge will never be forgotten. I think they expected that we would be new to most of the food, but besides that I certainly wasn't. It just seemed to be like my mum's cooking, but could be better. Later I found out from uncle Kayode that we were actually lucky, and that the rules had been bent so we could have meat as Babcock is vegetarian. I remember the first time we ate pounded yam (Semu) and I was surprised that the only people using their hands were me, my sister, Femi and Seyi. All the Nigerians, and everybody else, seemed to be using forks. I decided to fit in and use a fork, but it turned out to be too much hassle and so I resorted back to my hand.

I forgot to mention that since the second day of this trip I'd obtained a nasty cough and since there wasn't a lot of time in the morning and I didn't want to be a pain, I decided that I would visit the medical centre after we got back from seeing the king- unaware of the 9hour drive there and back. Anyway, on the way back I became very hot and had a headache- I was deemed to have a fever. After dinner I was taken to the medical centre. Inconveniently there was no light.

Anyway, after seeing the doctor and explaining my symptoms she recommended that I 'take some tests'. When we got to the test place the man at the counter sat me down, tied up my arm to stop blood flow and pulled out a needle. This never fazed me, but the thought of him sticking it into my vein did.

I was given about 4 different tablets for my cough and headache, something which would normally be resolved with one or two in England. After coming to collect the results of the test, I found out I had slight malaria, but this was easily resolved with a couple of tablets. I didn't actually realise the seriousness of malaria until I saw what happened to Femi and so I'm thankful to God that mine was spotted early, resolved and for being so kind to Femi too.

Our next venture was into the town of Abeokuta where we went to visit an orphanage called the **Steven Centre**, which Uncle Wale seemed very passionate about. The children told us their stories, all of which involved the religious violence in the north, all of which were very deep. Some described graphically how their parents were covered in petrol and burned in front of their own eyes. I can't imagine ever seeing something that violent. I remember one child saying that they forced his father to say Allah, but he refused and screamed Jesus till his death. I couldn't help but wonder if his death was in vain. Maybe he didn't really know Jesus, just because he screamed his name, doesn't earn him a place in heaven. However, when we asked how the children were able to carry on life and many were ready to answer and recite bible passages, it gave me the impression that they really did understand what they stood for, and what their parents died for.

After the Steven Centre we went to visit the legendary **Olumo Rock**. On arrival they made us wait outside the gate for about half an hour as they tried to squeeze every last kobo from us (they even tried to make us pay to bring in our own cameras). Once, we sat down to eat our packed lunch in the scorching heat. Me and a couple others were astonished by the site of a goat, which was standing casually on a vertical cliff- it was as if it was evading gravity. After eating we were ready to go up Olumo rock. There is

a very large, un-miss able structure which, seemed to be a lift. I didn't know we would actually be climbing it. So of we went, plugging up what seemed to be an endless staircase, in the burning heat. I was sweating before we started, by the time we got to our first stop, I felt like a wet mess. We toured Olumo Rock and saw some of its historic monuments, like the shrine, and the 3feet parting of the rock, in which the warriors actually hid (quite amazing actually).

When we got to the half way point the tour guide offered to take us through the lift, but we decided to carry on- I remember Tolu's mum saying 'how can you come to Olumo Rock and not take this route?' We headed up the route, which started with a ladder, which all thirty-something of us had to climb one by one. After that, we just had to make our own way through the various rocks, until we got to the top (it was a bit like rock climbing- without the safety rope!). The final stage of the climb was just an upward trek to the top, my plimsolls had barely any grip and as I looked down I envisioned my self slipping and rolling down the hill, as my head bounced repeatedly like a football. Luckily, it didn't happen like that; I got to the top and was able to enjoy the beautiful view of the town, from the top of the rock.

The most significant thing about this day was the completely different moods and feelings, and the change in mood. It was a very sad and tense atmosphere when we visited the Steven Orphanage Centre as we listened to their horrific tales. But at the top of Olumo Rock it was like all that had been forgotten and everyone was happy again. Uncle Wale addressed this, but after a while I realised that the children at the orphanage have gone through a lot, and try to live happy lives, so feeling bad for them wouldn't help in any way.

I figured that somewhere in this I should mention the many inspirational seminars that we had. I think we had our first seminar on the first day, because I can remember falling asleep every 3 minutes for about a minute, and then my neck jerking as I woke up. I was surprised nobody noticed. But after some good rest I actually found that there was a lot to be learnt from these seminars. There was quite an entertaining seminar by Pastor G. So also Pastor Olaore gave a nice speech about impossible meaning that it is just not possible 'YET!' which is now my motto.

After quite a busy first week, we were told to pack a weekend bag as we were off to Lagos!! The first thing that came to my head was visiting my cousins, who I'd normally stay with in Nigeria and of whom I'd talked to regularly on the phone, in my time in Nigeria. I'd already talked to Uncle Kayode about someone visiting us. Understandably, they were very cautious about anyone taking us away and so he told me that he would have to speak to my Dad and the person taking us. But first we had to get to Lagos. The journey to Lagos was 'two hours' (Nigerian time), which made it about four and a half. The positive side about this is that the coach journeys were where we all really bonded and gelled as a unit.

We could tell when we had reached Lagos. The roads were so much smoother, had less potholes and for the first time in my whole stay in Nigeria I saw traffic lights!! This was a big change to the last time I came to Nigeria- there were armed guards as traffic wardens. The ironic thing about the traffic lights was that they had a countdown on them, which signalled when it would change. We headed straight for

Lekki phase 1 and everyone remembers seeing a shopping plaza, which the adults labelled Shoprite even though that was just a shop inside the plaza.

We arrived at Victory Sanctuary church and outside the church is where we ate our lunch. After that we joined the service, which was going on in the church. We'd arrived at the end, because we had been eating, so thankfully, it was over quickly as we're already tired. While everybody else was in the service, Adeolu, Seyi, David and I moved everyone's bags into the house. After the service, we were shown around the house and delighted by its class. It had a nice living room with a high-definition Television.

After a look around the house we returned to the church for the evening service. Pastor G had told us earlier that praise and worship here was much better than England, I didn't fully understand what he was on about- but I was about to find out. The music kicked in (the musicians were actually very good) everybody started to sing and dance and up came this very lively atmosphere. Surprisingly that is one of the things I miss about Nigeria and all the new people and...

Anyway, after a lively service it was time to go home, which was conveniently across the road. More bad news, we weren't able to get mattresses and so would be sleeping on wooden mats, and my cousin wouldn't be able to pick me up until tomorrow morning. So a rough night it would be. I used the bed sheet I luckily packed to cover myself, and stuffed my pillow case with y towel. This turnout to be a good experience as my parent always says – “make the best use of what is available to you”.

When my uncle - Segun Junior arrived at the gate, we immediately recognised him and I signalled to uncle Kayode that it was him coming to pick us. Junior wanted to lead us to the car, but uncle was very cautious and made sure we waited for him to come with us. When we reached uncles Kunle and Gbenga at the car, uncle Kayode and aunty Yemisi took pictures of them so that they could remember what they look like. I was actually impressed by the care they took in handing us over to somebody else. Uncle Kayode was adamant that they returned us the following morning by ten o'clock prompt as we had a lot to do the next day.

Once we were released, we had time to catch up with our cousins and tell them about the stuff we had picked up and the things that had surprised us in Nigeria. Junior told us about how Babcock had forced him to be a vegetarian. They asked if we were hungry and suddenly we stopped. As we stepped out of the car my mouth watered at the site of a chicken shop. As I stepped into the shop my initial reaction was to buy everything. After getting my meal, I couldn't wait to get home and eat it and I thought about nothing else for the rest of the journey. I bet you can guess what I did next - after saying hello to my older cousin Funke, I sat down to devour my meal.

We spent that day at her dad's house where we caught up. We also watched his wife pound yam- she was surprisingly very strong. As she pounded the yam all I could see was my head bouncing around the utensil as she used the stick to batter it (luckily that didn't happen!). After an extended stay, we, and our freshly pounded yam, headed back to Funke's house where we had a cosy night in and watched a street dance competition, until the power went out- NEPA!! I remember a girl called Seeke telling me that NEPA stood for Never Expect Power Always. I spent the rest of the night

admiring my cousin children - Daisy's intelligence and how she tolerates the troublesome Bobo. I slept in a comfortable bed, which after my night on the floor; I had learned not to take for granted.

After a very comfortable and peaceful night we were ready to return to the others. I really enjoyed the night away. Uncle Kunle drove us back and we reached the house at ten o'clock on the dot as promised our team leaders. We were ready for a jam-packed day, which we knew would involve going to the shopping plaza and visiting Lekki beach. But when we arrived nobody was ready and it looked like Uncle Kayode had just woken up too. So after waiting for everybody to dress up and eat breakfast, we were ready to head out- but not before devotion. We spent the first half hour waiting for the pastor to arrive, but Uncle Ayo decided that we couldn't wait any longer so we started devotion by ourselves. After devotion we were ready to head for Lekki beach, but there was a problem; the pastor we were waiting for had finally arrived and since he had travelled a long way he was not to be disappointed. So we were made to get out of the coach to have a second consecutive devotion.

After another longer devotion, we were finally headed for Lekki beach, but we were faced with yet another challenge. Because we had two devotions there was no longer enough time to go to Lekki Beach and Shopping Mall. Most of the older boys weren't too enthusiastic about the beach, which caused a little argument with Tolu's mum, and so we went to Shoprite. While there we looked around and headed for the cinema, but we couldn't watch most of the films as they started when we had to leave. Half an hour later I found out that most people were on the coach and so I went to get everyone that was still in the shopping plaza. Unfortunately I was unable to buy anything. Now we are headed for the beach but there's an announcement, there is no time to go to the beach, two minutes later we were home- something tells me we were never heading for the beach in the first place.

After an entertaining trip in Lagos we were headed back to Babcock but not before stopping of for the longest seminar we had ever experienced. But luckily I came prepared, I had borrowed some sunglasses to mask my eyes while I slept off. When I woke up I found that we were assessing our strengths and weaknesses. My strength was that I was quite an intelligent person. My weakness was that perhaps I found things a bit too easy and this caused me to be lazy. I made a promise to myself that this school year is the year I will get rid of that attribute.

After the seminar, we finally headed back to Babcock. We spent most of the last week in and around campus relaxing and our last real excursion was to go and visit the king of all Yoruba Kings in Ile Ife. This, like most outings started with a long journey. Accept this time there was a scare; we had stopped because there was news that there were armed robbers ahead. I remember Fola and Aunty Kenny telling everyone in our coach to be quiet. I think they over reacted; someone on the other side of the window would not be able to hear us, let alone someone 2 or 3 miles away. After a short scare, we're on our way again and soon reached our destination.

Once we reached there, I was very impressed with the palace, with large gates and a considerable amount of security. We were made to wait in the waiting room, which I actually thought was the throne room as it looked so classy. This experience was pretty much the same as the last one- a lot of prostrating and '*Kabiyesi*'. But this time

I was actually amused by two men who sat comfortably by the king's feet and replied '*Oba nki o*' every time we greeted the king. After introducing ourselves to the king we were treated to lunch in the palace, which was quite good. We also watched an 18 year-old Philippine, who was the CEO of an international company; given a presentation to the king, trying to market his company's product. It was quite hilarious when he tried to say Yoruba words, but his position at his age was very inspiring. On our way out from the king's palace we were surprised to see that the king owned ostriches.

We enjoyed the last days on campus with all the new friends we had made, and although eager to get home, I was unhappy that I would be leaving people behind and will try to keep in touch with everyone!

This journey home is eye opener and we learn a great deal about our origin. Trip like this will make us appreciate what God has done in our lives and prepare us to be more determined to help the less privileged. I and my sister will be happy to contribute to any fund raising in helping the Orphanage Centre. We will miss Pastor G type of worship for the time being but hoping to meet up with him in future.

I would like to say a big thank you to Uncle Kayode, Aunty Yemisi, Mrs Orija and everyone who was involved in organising this trip and ensuring that it ran smoothly. Also, thanks to my Mr Joseph and Ms Keariann who got in touch with Cornerstone to ensure our place on this trip. I would also like to thank everyone for making me feel very welcome, and help me to enjoy my time in Nigeria. Glory be to God almighty for the save Cornerstone Fellowship Home Coming Trip 2009.