

# Chapter Two



## JOE B: A SHREWD THEATREPRENEUR AND A GENTLEMAN

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Undeniably, the theatre is a place for collective behaviour because of its capacity to bring the audience together to watch a play and share the experience. The satisfaction of experiencing the performance and the satisfaction of sharing the experience enables Man to mingle his individual experience with others in which he functions as part of a larger body. It is only for this reason that one can say with considerable justification that theatre is life. I learnt this lesson as a student at the Open Air Theatre of the University of Jos in the summer of 1991.

I was a freshman and the course was entitled Introduction to Theatre and the lecturer was Joe Tor Iorapuu. First on his reading list was Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. As a freshman, the little knowledge I had of Sophocles' play was that it was the original version of Ola Rotimi's tragedy *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. But after Iorapuu's class, I gained more perceptive insights into Sophocles' tragedy. I realized, for the first time, that the play is a tragedy of destiny showing the contrast between the supreme will of the gods and the vain attempts of mankind to escape the evil that threatens them. But most importantly, I discovered that the play is a philosophic comment on life in general and a profound

statement about submission to the divine will and the realization of our own impotence as human beings. In other words, Sophocles puts forward the argument that fate predetermined everything in life. If you consent you are led on by fate, if you resist you are dragged along by fate. This very lesson has left an abiding mark on me and has given me the strength to carry on in life.

This piece is a testimony by one of Professor Tor Iorapuu's former students. And because it is a testimony, it is a narrative of debts owed and kindnesses received, lessons taught and learnt, inspirations gained and examples admired and emulated. Furthermore, this piece traverses the delicate space between the personal and the professional. In the first place, Tor Iorapuu is my teacher with whom I have exchanged several areas of wisdom especially in the area of Theatre for Development. Our conversations turned frequently on the viability of participatory theatre and interactive theatre and how it could be used to promote civic dialogue and engagement. For Tor Iorapuu, this concern became a passion. So engrossed was he with TFD that he was to later established a non-governmental organization in Jos city known as Youth Adolescent and Reflection and Action Centre (YARAC) whose aim is to cater for the educational and psychological needs of youth in Nigeria. His other play, *Had I Known* is greatly influenced by the activities of this organization. In yet another play, entitled *April 1421*, Iorapuu, first, throws a puzzle to the audience with the title and then burlesques the general elections that took place in Nigeria on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 2007.

In the second place, Tor Iorapuu is my colleague and a friend who has nurtured my academic growth. When he served as Dean Faculty of Arts University of Jos, he appointed me as a member of the editorial board of the Faculty's journal, a position I have held till date. Besides, he was always willing to ask me to deputize for him during his absences. As Dean, he facilitated a collaboration between the Faculty of Arts and some Universities in Kenya and South Africa. And as a member of the University's Governing Council, he provided great assistance and direction to the University management.

Iorapuu's humility is both amazing and edifying; his sense of modesty compelling and challenging. I will never forget a very unfortunate incident that happened on the 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2016. On the

night of that day, the University's main Library and the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences were on fire. Tor Iorapuu was there trying desperately to quench the fire. So wild were the flames of the fire that attempting to douse it was like craving for suicide. Iorapuu mobilized the students, they poured water, they carried sand they combated the fire until four o'clock in the morning. It was no good. The fire was victorious but he emerged as a hero and a fire-fighter that was celebrated by the media. Tor Iorapuu is a man who could easily melt into any community. He has no airs, no insistence on special treatment. He attended a ceremony at St. Edward Catholic Church Uga, Benue state where his younger brother served as Parish priest. He brought out his camera, mounted it on the tripod and covered the event. Perhaps, he wanted to demonstrate that he is a teacher of Theatre and Film Arts as well.

Like the rest of us in the Faculty, he too sweated in an office without a fan or air-conditioner. Students and colleagues admire him because he has so much of the theatrical in him. He can drum and sing and dance any time the occasion demanded. He has a joke for every one of his students and he knows them by name. His best friends are the rural folks. He derives great pleasure talking to them about civic rights, about leadership and other social issues. When in 2019, he aspired to become the Governor of Benue State, he had massive support and a large followership. On the staff side, his presence is an invaluable asset. He has always played the role of a conflict manager each time there was a crisis in the faculty. He is the one we run to whenever we reach a chronic knot in the rope. He has mentored many academics within and outside the University of Jos.

A quiet and consensus builder, Iorapuu has an accommodating disposition and is always in the middle of the road. He is tenacious without being overbearing, accommodating and permissive, firm but fair. As a Knight of the Order of St. Mulumba, he is kind, charitable, generous and very willing to share his 3Ts namely: time, talent and treasure.

And now it is time to celebrate this theatre practitioner and

academic Samson. Here is a man whose iron will always have a place for tenderness. Here is a man of passion, flower and flame. Here is a staunch defender of justice and human rights. Here is a dependable comrade, uncommonly courageous, principled and consistent. Here is a passionate lover of life and laughter. Here is distinction and merit. Here is Joe B, the Vice Chancellor.