

Childhood Experiences

English translation:

Interviewer: Please, how did you grow up?

Interviewee: As I have mentioned earlier, I hail from Ibadan city, and that is where I grew up. I grew up in... I lived with my grandma – in short I can say that I was raised by an aged person¹, because the way an aged woman will train a child will be different from the way an average young woman that just gave birth will. You learn a lot of things from an aged person², because with her, you will learn the standard Yoruba. You will learn... They will talk to you as they talk to people using adages. For example, you can be told that... like... something like:

You – Please take this.

The aged woman or young woman – Put it on my head.

If you are with your young mother, you can put it on her head because you don't know the meaning of the adage since you are just getting to grow into maturity. But with someone staying with an aged woman, you will know that she is indirectly telling you to put the object down. That was why she said it the opposite way. Things like that can only be learned from an aged woman.

We also have what we called stories; it could be *àlò alápamo*³, *alásoje*⁴... It is the elders that teach us. If you stay with them... like in the days of old, people will gather around, where children are more, an older man or woman will sit with them. The older man or woman will tell stories, and children will start learning from that. Sometimes it happens when there is a full moon, when everywhere will be clear like it's morning. The stories will be told, and people will respond accordingly, like *àlò àpagbè*⁵... like:

Question – Who knows it?

Answer – I know it.

Question – A long rod touches the ground and the heavens. What is it?

People might be wondering what that means, what a rod is, a rod touching the ground and heavens, can anyone see the heavens, but with the knowledge of Yoruba and with the fact that one is raised by an aged parent, you will think deeply of what that could mean. You might not understand it immediately, but you will be explained to because of next time. So like the question, “A long rod touches the ground and the heavens,” it means rain in Yoruba land. Because the rain will fall from the sky and touch the ground and so on and so forth.

¹ Grandparents.

² Grandparents.

³ A type of story that is told to narrate an event.

⁴ A type of story that calls for responses. It's a question-and-answer story.

⁵ A type of story.

We also have games that we played when we were younger, like *sùwé*⁶. That, we will draw a line like a triangle on the ground; it will be very wide. We will demarcate it and start the game; we can close our eyes and jump the lines one after the other. We also play *bojúbojú*⁷. We will sing...

Olórò bọ̀, sé kí i se? Eni tí olórò bá mú, ó máa pá je ni o.

Olórò is coming, should I open it? Whosoever the *olórò* picks, he will eat.

So when they say that, everyone will hide. When the *olórò* says, “*Sé kí i se?* (Should I open it?)” if you say, “*Sé o* (Open it),” they will start looking everywhere for us, to find our hideout. That is also part of the children’s play.

We also have one that is called *ténten*⁸; we will be clapping our hands and moving our legs. It is one of the exercises that make a child grow in health. We also have different games where there are lots of children. The children can act out different plays and delegate roles to themselves, like “you be the father and I the mother.” We will do that based on the experience we have learned from our parents. We know that if the parents wake up in the morning, the mother will kneel to greet her husband and cook, so when we gather ourselves together like in threes and fours, we will say, “You be the daddy, you be the mummy and I will be the child.” Those are the types of play we indulge in when we are much younger.

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⁶ A game where lines are drawn on the ground and children jump across without stepping on the lines.

⁷ Another type of game where children hide and one of them is picked to look for the others. The chosen one is called the *bojúbojú*.

⁸ Another type of game that involves clapping of the hands and moving of the legs.