



White Sails

By Ibrahim B.

Life to me is like a sailing boat; not a fancy one, but one with dark or white sails to indicate surrender or victory. It could get attacked on all sides by blasts of piercing winds, turgid torrents of gushing water enough to sink it. But all through it still stands firm in its hold on the ocean.

My life is relative to this kind of sailing boat. The last time I'd not seen my parents for long periods of the year was five years ago when I was ten. It wasn't long a period compared with other people but I think it was a period spanning six to seven months. I remember getting on my father's Cruiser 3-series and hitting the road off to the airport. I remember with vivid details what clothes he had on at that time. He wore a white jumper with sea-blue striped chinos and an expensive pair of chucks to blend in with the prevailing fashion trend that had swept the feet of every fashion advisor in town. As usual he had his half-moon glasses with his same old suspicious grin and piercing everything around with his watchful eye like a satellite tower watches the skies for interstellar activity. My mum was in England at that time and I wasn't worried about that because we spoke everyday and I felt her presence wherever I went like a falcon feels the warm or cold breeze as it whizzes through the air, faster than any living thing on the planet.

As he finally boarded the plane and took to the waiting skies, I could do nothing but wave and smile with a mix of joy and confusion like a confused scarecrow magically brought to life by some unknown force of nature.

Over the next few days I lived with an uncle at an enormous house the size of a mountain. There was lots and lots of food preferences to choose from, so much technology and books to while away the time. I played around with my talkative cousins who liked to misbehave and cause damage to anything they could destroy. Because of their destructive tendencies there were always maintenance men roaming the halls of the house like skulking cats looking for mice to chase. In the afternoons,

we would do a bit of quasi-hiking adventures up the rugged hills around the house. Occasionally someone would fall down a hill and sprain his back but I was the careful one and so I never hurt myself. In the evenings I and my cousins would assemble in a hall lined with portraits of chubby looking old men and women who had funny, suspicious facial expressions as if they knew something you didn't. Anyways, we would hear spooky stories about witchcraft from my uncle and aunt who looked like they'd lived a wonderful life. They were so easy going and allowed us to live our lives because they believed individual freedom brought the best in all of us. Eventually, I lived with them for several months in a weather that was so sporadic that you would think you were in the coldest night of winter in London. I thought initially that I'd live with my uncle for eternity but just when I was beginning to love the place, I was scurried off to my great uncle's mansion at Accra. A banker, he had not time at all for himself or even for me. But I thought the whole idea would be fun since it'll be only me to myself and various other forms of edutainment gadgets like scrabble boards, video games, e-readers, novels and such like.

I coped on well for a couple of days with little or no worries to sink into. Then it dawned on me that my parents were away and not around to chat me to sleep; to read me bedtime stories. I began to sink within myself like a boat would sink in a swirling pool of water. I began to have amnesic memories of my parents and how my life had been with them. Occasionally I would get feelings of euphoria from times when we went to dinner parties and to Thanksgiving Ceremonial Services or invitation of some family friends. Most memorable of these streaming memories was the fun times I had with them on Guy Fawke's Night some years back on my 7th birthday.

Recounting these memories were as sour as the taste of garlic and as piercing as sharp edged pikes. During this period, I got my first and possibly last asthma attack. I don't really remember what caused this to happen but all I remember is that I woke up one sunny morning with incoherent hiccups which eventually turned into a whooping cough. I coughed for what seemed like eternity and it felt as if my lungs were going to explode and obliterate into smithereens or like broken shards of china. I think I blacked out because the next thing I remembered was waking up to smells of chlorine and aspirin and seeing all those drips connected to my body, I realized I was in a hospital. It was one of the saddest experiences I've had to have in my life so far.

Although most of my days were sad, I had equally happy experiences to fill the deep hole emerging in my heart. After I'd been discharged and brought back to my house by my uncle who was at that time on a three month work leave, I decided I needed a break; a break from my depression, my demise and everything that made

me upset. At that time actually there was a ferry called the Dodi Princess that undertook cruising expeditions in around the shores of the country. I decided to register with my uncle but he pulled out because he had his work to attend to. Alas! I went on a three-week cruise along the Gulf of Guinea and returned light hearted and feeling at peace with myself.

As the secrets of the future begun to unravel itself as I left the present and approached, I began to do serious academic work than I'd ever done in my entire life. I took up the habit of reading two 300 page novels each day – it sounds out of this world but that's what I did. As time when by, I developed my academic and intellectual acumen in Math and Science – you could actually call me a polymath. I began to see success coming and aced all my tests with all the thoughts of my parents departure locked up somewhere in the deep neurotic dungeons of my mind. I realize I could spend more than twelve hours learning in one day than sleeping, eating or exercising my past times. Beginning that fear and for four successive academic years starting from Grade 6, I scored starred A's in everything examination I took – not A's or "exceed expectations" remarks, but starred A's or "outstanding" remarks.

During this period and because of the late hours my uncle kept as a banker, there were, should I say a few out-of-the –world things that I did which went unnoticed, I think by anyone.

In the first place there was this massive, spotted Russian Labrador that lived next door. I wasn't playful with the kids in that hour and so anytime I passed by on my bike would start barking at me and try to chase me around. So one day I lured it to my house, set up a plate of dog food, poured a solution of rat poison and enticed it to eat. I then lured it back to its house, I don't know how, pronto. After a couple of days, I was invited by one of the kids next door to a requiem they were holding for the Labrador, no one asked how it died and I pretty much shut up about it. I think I felt good about myself until I was reunited with my parents again after six months of their departure.

Well I was born on a winter night in January 1997 at Liverpool, the home of an internationally acclaimed premiership football club. My birth was unusual because I stayed locked up in my mother's womb for ten painfully exciting months. This is where life began for me. I don't remember most parts of my childhood life but what I do remember is that I had many friends and I lived in a house full of flowers and portraits and china. I think I remember all these details because of the pictures of my childhood I was shown by my dad.

If my memory serves me right, then one summer noon, I think, my mum told me that she and I were going on long distance journey to a faraway place. I

enquired, "Mummy where are we going". To which she answered, "To a place you'll grow to like as time goes on". I didn't understand her at first but I understood her better when weeks after our conversation, I saw myself descending the stairs of a plane. I don't even remember boarding onto a runway and an environment that looked like nothing I'd ever seen. "Where are all the teeming schools of people?" I asked myself. I was five back then.

With me was my mum and so I didn't feel so forlorn of the place I'd left for what seemed like moments ago. My parents had bought a five bedroom house in a residential area in Accra and so off we went to a place I would now be calling home. I lived there with my mum who was into fashion designing and had the occasional short trips to different parts of Africa and beyond to exhibit her works and also tutor other upcoming fashion designers. I still got to see my mum a lot often as I got used to the warmth of Ghana. At age seven, my mother had to leave to the UK to rejoin my dad and so I was left behind and all alone with a superstitious aunt who had come to live at my mum's for a while. She was a very observant woman and watched everything around her with a keen eye. She watched me in particular and sometimes gave me the creeps. One day, when I was whiling away the time by watching some bogus cartoon, she came to sit by my side like the mother she wasn't and began to tell me tall tales about people whose lives ended on a sad note because they were left-handed, whom the gods despised.

I didn't know she was up to any hideous schemes until when one day I was minding my own little business trying to paint a portrait of my mum when suddenly she tore my nearly finished art piece, and ranted on about how lefties were outlawed. She left me standing there ground to the spot where she saw me painting with pouted lips and wondering eyes trying to process why in the world someone would do this to a seven year old. I made sure my mother heard of it after she returned months later. She axed her out and advised me to use whatever God gave me well. At that time, I was in school learning subjects I was unfamiliar with like Twi. I remember a painful situation where I had to be tied, eventually, to a table to be given four heavy strokes from the whip of teacher who couldn't understand why I couldn't memorise or recite the alphabets in Twi. I was six at that time when my mum heard about it, she withdrew me from the school and took me to a more disciplined school as she claimed.

Life was a lot better there and the teacher there understood where I was coming from. My first real examination was in my second grade where I came first. It shocked everyone and even me (well I don't remember the reason why everyone was shocked).

Growing up, I had exposure to a lot of delicacies and most of the [] I would eat something new at school or at home. But one delicacy I'd hate to include in my choice of food is pizza. That's simply because at age seven I threw up like I'd never done before as I felt the first bite of pizza sink down my throat in style. I began to savour the taste but I knew before long that I was going to throw up.

However, I still moved on with my life. In Grade 5, a part of my life, I'll never forget, I fought with my best friend over nothing at all but a movie we watched the previous night. It wasn't a brawl though, but I think I went home with a red eye. We made up eventually and life went on as usual. One important aspect of my life I'll never forget is when I learnt how to ride my tricycle. I felt good with myself after summoning the courage to get on that old rugged bike with rusty handle bars and an old bell that made raucous rings. It felt like nothing I'd ever felt before and for a long time, I've lived with this soothing memory.

In retrospect of all my history so far, I feel that my parent's absence at some stages in my life has helped me cope and react to different situations and actually helped build my inner self.

THE END