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"I count my joys instead"

Chidinma describes how she found happiness through a friend and a three week internship at Wavecrest Students Hall, Surulere, Lagos.

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Hi everyone, my name is Chidinma Eucharia Ikwelle. I would love to share with you my three weeks internship experience at Wavecrest Students Hall, Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria. My story dates back to when the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike was 3 months old and was becoming unbearable for me. I let myself become overwhelmed by my emotions as I was very sad, depressed, lonely and angry, both at myself and everyone around me. Most of this can be attributed to the fact that I wasn't doing anything to keep myself busy at that moment, apart from a few online courses which I wasn't really interested in. These feelings went on for a while and I can say I was really unhappy. I could feel it that I was so empty and there was something wrong. This made me to be very quiet at home, I lost interest in discussions, I sometimes took offense at very little things my siblings did. In fact, I found myself doing things I preach against and it was really bad. It continued like this for days, weeks and even months. You must be

wondering how deep this was; it was really deep.

God willing, on one faithful day, I got a call from a friend at Greendale Centre, Nsukka, where I attend the means of formation imparted by the people of Opus Dei while in school. She asked after my well-being, but I couldn't open up to her at that moment about what was actually going on with me. She went ahead to ask me a question that not only brought a big smile to my face but continuously rang in my head for a while. She said "Chidinma, if you are given the opportunity, will you like to attend an internship program in catering and hospitality at Wavecrest Students Hall?" Instantly my face brightened. I started smiling unconsciously and I replied that I would really love that. She said she would get back to me and we hung up. Immediately after she hung up, I realized I hadn't sought permission

from my parents before accepting this proposal. I decided to let them know about it if I finally got the opportunity. Weeks passed and I got another call from her, but this time, it was to tell me to get myself prepared because I had just gotten myself something to be engaged in.

I was so happy, firstly because I could finally leave the house, and secondly because I would get myself busy with something worthwhile. She gave me a number to call to inform them of my interest in the opportunity and we hung up. Without wasting time, I dialed the number given to me twice, but I didn't get a response. I got worried, but some time later, the number called back. I was very excited as I picked the call. The voice of the lady speaking put me very much at ease; she already knew my name and the reason I called. We fixed an appointment. I could already feel a sense of joy

reawakening in me. When my parents got back, I told them about it and I was granted the permission to go.

On the day of the appointment, I got up very early as usual and prepared my body, soul and spirit. Funny, right? The beautiful arena filled with flowers of different kinds, coupled with the warm welcome I received from the young girl who opened the door for me, caught my attention. It already felt as though I was part of the house. The director asked me to start immediately and scheduled my work timetable.

I resumed work immediately and I blended so well into the new environment that even though I worked for just three weeks, it felt as if I had been there for a year. My first day at work was so wonderful, I was introduced to every other staff and their cheerful faces gave me

goosebumps. I was impressed by how everyone that came into the kitchen immediately noticed the new face and the beautiful uniform I wore. I felt very welcome and accepted as part of this family. This made me so happy. I never expected to be known so early, on my very first day.

That day, I worked in the servery section where I was taught how to clean and arrange utensils. After working at the servery, I went over to the bakery section where I helped out with making Chin-Chin. After working, we went for lunch and what was served that day was Amala and Ewedu soup. I thought about how I wouldn't be eating the food, which I had never tasted before. As if they had read my mind, they asked me if I had eaten Amala before and I said no. To my greatest surprise, I was convinced to give it a try and when I tasted it, I found that it wasn't bad after all. We talked about different things as we ate. I got to know some funny traits of my colleagues and it cracked me up. Although I was tired after the day's work, I was so happy that at last, I had gotten my smile back.

On one of those days, I was told to make bread using a recipe I was given. That day was a disaster. In the process of kneading the dough, I went out of control and completely spoilt the shape. We all laughed about that and I was taught how to do it and the bread came out fine. Most times, I also made the dish for the day and we all ate together very happily. We also went for an outdoor function, a food and beverage fare. We had so much fun, eating ice cream and learning how to make fruit shakes. It was really awesome and I was glad I was given the opportunity to be there. As time went on, I blended so well with everyone.

We worked, played, laughed, cracked jokes and prayed together.

Towards the end of the internship period, although I felt a little sad that it was ending, I was happy because of the great moments I shared with my new friends. On my last day there, I was bid farewell, and there was this joy all over my face as I hugged them all before going.

Now I consider the ASUU strike a blessing in disguise. I may have lost some time and opportunities as a result of the strike, but I count my joys instead: the joy of this wonderful opportunity to make new friends with amazing personalities, and the joy of learning new things in a wonderful environment. Throughout my stay there, I never had a moment to worry about anything. It was really an awesome experience and I am grateful to God for it. And I can't thank all those that worked with me

enough for the warm welcome I received when I arrived, and most especially my friend at Greendale, who gave me a long-lasting opportunity to be happy again.

Chidinma Eucharia Ikwelle

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