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I was a fly in a tomato can

A student narrates his experience at the Institute for Industrial Technology Lagos (IIT)

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I had just finished my WAEC (a secondary school leaving certificate exam) and, like every other student who has ever written this exam and finished, I felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt free and fulfilled. I spent the next few months watching movies,

playing games and generally wasting. (Don't blame me, I felt I was compensating myself for all the time I had spent studying for my exams). After sometime, I started asking myself the serious questions, questions like: so, now that I am done with my WAEC, what next? Where do I go from here? Should I go looking for work like most of my friends are doing, or should I just become the apprentice of a local barber, tailor or maybe a road side mechanic? Or, still yet, should I go to the university and spend another 5-6 years in school? I was a confused boy trying to discover the next step that life had in store for me. Then one day, my uncle (God bless him) whom I had grown up with and who observed the way I had been wasting my time, decided to help me out. So he sat me down and told me about the Institute for Industrial Technology Lagos (IIT). That was the beginning of my introduction to the

school that would shape my life into what it is today.

Let me be honest, at first I wasn't interested. I had never heard of IIT, and so I wasn't open to the idea at all. And when my uncle mentioned that it was one of the best technical colleges in the country, that just made me more resistant to the idea (I don't like anything technical). We ended up not deciding on anything, which was fine by me. But he continued bringing up the idea and so, like the typical boy I was, I finally gave in to the idea, telling him I would give it a try but that he shouldn't get his hopes up. (I later found out that my uncle had actually planned on attending IIT when he was younger but he was then presented with a job that he wasted no time in accepting.)

We began the journey to IIT and spent a long time on the road to get

there. I was tired, hungry, and grumpy when we arrived, but the first sight of the IIT building washed away most of the tiredness, and a new hunger crept in: curiosity. We were received warmly, and after a few minutes in the reception hall, we were taken around the school building. We were shown the various departments of IIT and got to see the electrical room, the electronics room, the mechanical room and workshop, the dining room, and my personal favourite, the automation lab.

I found out that the course work in IIT involves a lot of practical work, maybe even more than theory, which is far more than I can say for our higher institutions. I also got to know that IIT focuses a lot – and I mean a lot – on work ethics and human values. (Like one of my instructors would always say, ‘You may be the best engineer/technician in the world, but if your respect for human

life and work values are non-existent, you are not going anywhere in life'.) Already I was intrigued. IIT had won me over with its beautiful concept.

However, I still felt a sort of resistance to the school. "Why?" you may ask. Well, I grew up in the closed parts of Lagos (that is the not so nice parts), and schools like IIT were what we would see or hear about in the media and go, 'Oh, that's nice. I pray they last.' I never imagined that I would ever attend a school like this, a school that actually cares about and places its students first. I also didn't know I could reach the cut off mark for a school like this. And besides, even if I did, there would have still been the school fees to think of (let's face it: a school like this was not going to ask you to pay secondary school fees).

Nevertheless, I told myself, “There is actually nothing to lose if I take a chance. After all, if worst comes to worst, I will simply return home.” So I told my uncle, “Let’s go for it!” We bought the form (quite cheap), looked through it, filled it, and then I sat for the *exam of all exams*. It turned out to be basically what I had done in secondary school, and I came out smiling, as if I had just killed a giant, and awaited the result. Well, it came out, and I was told I had attained the cut off mark. Oh, how happy I felt at that point. One thing the admission officer said to me that I never forgot was, “Getting into IIT is the easy part; passing through it, now that’s another story.”

I had some trouble initially with the fees, but that was eventually sorted out with a scholarship grant (not an easy thing to get by the way). And so I made it; I finally made it to IIT. Throughout that week, I couldn’t stop

smiling. I felt a sense of accomplishment, as if I was finally moving in the right direction and nothing was going to stop me. Now, don't get me wrong. I am not saying everything was perfect; I just felt that I could handle whatever the world threw at me.

This story has a second part, the part where I came to know and love God more and in which I discovered the Catholic Church. I was brought up in a deep Pentecostal home where I grew up thinking that Jesus and the Bible were all I needed to get to heaven (how wrong I was). Now, when I say *deep* I really mean *deep*. Every single one of my relatives – beginning with my grandma, through my parents and my siblings, down to my cousins and even those of the very community I grew up in – are all Pentecostals. So you can imagine how deep the Pentecostal blood ran in me.

After spending some months in IIT, I had seen and done a lot; I had a lot of new friends and had been exposed to a lot of things; I had also met people of different characters, each unique in his own way. To cut the long story short, IIT had changed me and made me better in a lot of things. It helped and encouraged me in the times when I felt helpless and lost. I felt particularly lost when it came to sorting out my feelings about the Catholic Church. Throughout my childhood, I had been made to believe that the Catholic Church was a false religious denomination. My entire idea of the word *Catholic* back then was of people who worshipped and bowed down to Mary, so that didn't make me behave nicely towards Catholics.

Well, as of now, I am proud to say that I am a full-fledged Catholic preparing for my baptism and first Holy Communion. I won't lie to you;

it wasn't an easy process getting to know about the Catholic faith or Opus Dei. There were times when I would be so confused that it felt as if my head would explode. Here I was, a simple boy living a simple life, and then all of a sudden someone decided to turn everything I knew about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and faith upside down. He then went ahead to tell me that God is calling me to join His family. If you were in my shoes, would you answer Him or turn Him down? Well, after series of prayers, detailed research and study, I couldn't hold back the truth any longer. It was more than clear that Our Lord was calling me to come into His beautiful family, and who was I to refuse Our Lord?

My experiences have been amazing. Learning about Opus Dei has opened a new chapter in my life. I thought I knew a lot, and I didn't want to believe there was anything contrary

to what I believed. I was oblivious to the fact that there were many layers of knowledge of which I was ignorant. But I eventually came to realise that I was just a fly in a tomato can, which was inside a milk can within a drum, which in turn was located in a room inside a house. And this fly thought he knew everything until IIT broadened his view, taking him out of his tomato can and making every day a new adventure.

I have spent almost two years in IIT and been fortunate to meet some very wonderful people: friends, colleagues and brothers who have made an impact in my life all thanks to IIT. I have to say that whoever comes to IIT, regardless of race, colour or religion, can never leave the same.

And so I come to the end of my story for now, and if someone were to ask

me where I see myself in the next five years, well, I would answer by saying, come and see for yourself. My name is Kenneth and I am glad to say that I have left the tomato can behind.

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