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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 Eucharika 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 *server*y 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 spoiled 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 Eucharika Ikwelle

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