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Topic : If I Could Invent Something New

Onwa na etiliora, an Igbo word meaning the moon that shines for the world, is the loving and well earned title given to my loving grand uncle. It is with a grave heart that I recall his last moments before he left this bitter world. I have been in mourning since my mother got that dreaded telephone call in the early hours of May 3, 2024. “Onwa is gone, my uncle is gone oooo. “ She wailed and fell in a heap at my side.

You see, my uncle was no ordinary man. He served as the Director General of the Federal Capital Territory after he rose to the rank of Permanent Secretary in the Nigerian Civil Service, the highest position a civil servant can attain. His leadership was pivotal during the historic move of Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja, a task he executed with precision and dedication. He oversaw the development of critical infrastructure, including the construction of major roads, government buildings, and housing estates. Most importantly he was loving and kind man.

Cancer! What an ugly world. Onwa was diagnosed with cancer in 2012 after undergoing various tests to diagnose a recurring health condition. On one of my visits to his palatial residence in Abuja, I was shaken by how lean he looked. He didn’t have his usual energy and his skin looked pale. “Are you okay, papa?” I asked. “I have cancer,” he replied, prostrate cancer. I will be okay boy.

The journey to survive cancer began. He would start chemotherapy treatments which was a powerful medicine to fight the disease. But interestingly chemotherapy fights both cancer cells and healthy cells. While its primary goal is to target and destroy cancerous cells, it can also affect normal cells such as those found in the bone marrow, hair follicles, and the lining of the digestive tract.

The side effects were brutal on my uncle. I witnessed first hand his lack of energy to do even the simplest tasks. The thick jet black curly hair on his head thinned and fell off in clumps. His skin became dry and scaly, and he would itch till he bled. He suffered bouts of vomiting from persistent nausea. He couldn’t stand food as his mouth was filled with sores. His body was in distress. In his eyes, I saw fear but I also saw resilience and courage. As a family, we showed up with love. We would encourage him, and go home to cry.

That is why if I could invent something new, it would have to be a medication that targets cancer cells specifically, without affecting healthy cells. It will be a smarter way to fight cancer without putting the body in a lot of danger. I will do that to honor the memory of Onwa na etiliora, and for everyone that has had to go through the harsh chemotherapy treatment. It would be a win for the whole world, and who knows, could win me a Nobel prize.