Dan Chuke Oral History Interview

February 3rd, 2025

Interviewee: Dan Chuke
Interviewer: Chinaza Asiegbu
Location of Interview: WhatsApp Video Call

Biographical Note

Dan Chuke is a mechanical engineer and businessman. Originally from Obosi in southeastern Nigeria, he was educated under Catholic missionary institutions before pursuing engineering studies in Nigeria and New Zealand. His experiences span the colonial and post-independence periods in Nigeria, the Nigerian Civil War era, and extended professional work in Zambia and New Zealand, where he built a career in industrial development and engineering management before returning to Nigeria to engage in business and public service.

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Technical Note

This interview was conducted remotely via WhatsApp video and recorded in digital audio format. The recording was subsequently transcribed and lightly edited for clarity and readability. This transcript preserves the content and meaning of the original interview while correcting minor transcription errors and formatting inconsistencies.

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Chinaza Asiegbu: Hello, my name is Chinaza Asiegbu and I'm conducting an oral history interview for the Nigerian Stories Archive today. The date is February 3rd, 2025 and I'm with Dan Chuke.

Dan Chuke: Okay, my name is Daniel Onyeka Chuke. I come from Obosi, a village in the Idemili North Local Government. Before the local governments came in, it was just Obosi, Onitsha Province, Eastern Nigeria. Yes, and that's where I grew up. I grew up in Obosi, actually. I went to the primary school in Obosi, at that time called St. Teresa's Catholic School, Primary School, Obosi. It has now been, the name has now been changed to Chuke Memorial Primary School in Obosi because my grandfather Chuke, you know, was responsible for attracting the Catholic mission to Obosi. And he gave them a piece of land, where they eventually built the school and the church. And the agreement was that all the descendants of my great-grandchildren would go to school free of charge, in that school. It didn't happen anyway.

We, over that time, we haven't, we haven't do, we just there for a short while and then they, people started paying the fees.

CA: Really? Really. Oh no.

DC: And I believe it was to compensate that, that they named the school after my grandfather Chuke. Yes. So that's where I went to school. At that time, you know, you know, there wasn't electricity or pipe or water in Obosi. You know, for water, you depended on the Idemili River, we used to go to fetch water for drinking, for cooking, for washing. You know, so it was a daily chore, you know, to go to the stream. Sometimes you went two times a day. In the morning, first in the morning, and then after school in the afternoon. And you carry, of course, you carry your buckets or your pots, you know, on the head. And, you know, the streams usually are in a valley, so you have to go down the valley to get the stream and then come up the hill, you know, with your heavy bucket or pots. And of course, shoes and things like that were not really commonplace as they are now. So you went with the bare feet, you know, and of course, you know, with the sand and the heat, the sand can be quite hot. So you come up, you know, with the scorched feet, you know, it was quite arduous. And of course, you alternate that, you know, with the firewood, firewood, fetching our firewood because you have to cook. There was no gas, you know, cooking, gas or electricity, you know, at that time. So you have to cook with firewood in an open fire, more or less. So you have to fetch the firewood. And of course, everybody had to do a bit of agriculture, you know, you have to farm your food, cassava, yam, beans, and things like that, you know, but so...

CA: Would people trade as well, or?

DC: Yes, of course. Well, everybody was a trader really. I mean, I remember those days, you know, my mom was, she had a brother who was working up in the north, in the, I think, John Holt, and he was sending dried fish from the north to her, and she would trade. she will market it, you know? And of course do a bit of dressmaking and sewing to compliment, you know? So people were quite busy. And people were quite happy, you know what I mean? There was no electricity, there was no television.

So, for entertainment, we love the moon. Whenever the new moon coming out, people will gather in the square at night and play lots of games, you know, till sometimes till about 10 o'clock in the night before we went back to bed. And funny enough, you know, people manage to sleep well. Even though you have to bother about having a bath at night, you went to school, you have a bath maybe only once a day, in the morning. Either when you go to swim, or maybe with the water that you had, you can have a quick bath in the morning. Nobody talked about having a bath again in the evening. Even with all that work and all that, people slept very well, and quite happy. Early stories, if you like, moonlights, you know, stories, you know, folklores, you know.

CA: Do you remember any?

DC: Igbo folklores.

CA: Do you remember any Igbo folklores?

DC: Well, I can still remember some that have to do with tortoises. The story about tortoise is always there, about how cunning it is and that kind of thing, you know. So, you know, so, um, and people are very engaged, you know, with kind of stories, you know. And you listen to elders, you know, elders telling their own stories, their own experiences of life. And, it was quite, it was quite enjoyable, you know.

CA: Yes.

DC: In the afternoon, of course, you know, if you are not going to firewood or going to fish stream, you play soccer. You know, we play soccer with a homemade ball. You know, we go to some rubber plantation, you know, and make some flour, some rubber. You know and then tie it around some cloth or some paper and then wrap it around and it bounces and that's their football.

CA: Oh wow.

DC: So, that was it. And of course, you know, religion was very important in the life of people in those days. You know, because first, you know, the missionaries, you know, came, when they came, they found that it was experienced to not just only preach religion and preach the Bible, but also to build schools so they can catch the children early. So we pay a lot to the missionaries because they were responsible for our going to school. Even before the government, you know, in those days, how many government schools? There were very few government schools. Most of the schools, both at the primary and the secondary levels, were owned by the Christian missions. So they played a very pivotal role in the upbringing and education of people at that time.

CA: You had mentioned that you said it was your great-grandfather who allocated that space for the Catholic Missionary to build the school.

DC: Yes. My grandfather did.

CA: Oh, your grandfather.

DC: Because it was land owned by my grandfather and his brothers. You know, the deal for free education covered his brother's descendants, too. That's why I say the offsprings of my great-grandfather.

CA: Was the deal written?

DC: But it was my father, it was my grandfather Chuke.

CA: Mm, okay.

DC: Who brought the school, who brought the Catholic mission to the village?

CA: Yes. Was the deal written on paper or was it just a deal that they spoke about?

DC: I think you know that those days, you know, there was not too much legalese, you know. It was a gentleman's agreement.

CA: A gentleman's agreement.

DC: It was a gentleman's agreement, you know.

CA: How did your, how did your grandfather meet the Catholic missionary to begin with?

DC: Yes, it was kind of a coincidental meeting, my grandfather and his cousin were traveling, you know, to, I think, to Nnewi for something, on foot, of course. And then as they were crossing the Ulasi River, at Okija, I don't know if you know any of these places.

CA: Yes, yes.

DC: At Okija, they saw a white man who was carrying his bicycle across the water. So my grandfather and his cousin decided to assist him. And then they started talking. The missionary, the white missionary was coherent, they know a lot of Igbo. they just managed to talk and he told them that he was a Reverend Father and he was based in the Holy Trinity, Onitsha, and he was going to Ihiala on cycle from Onitsha to Ihiala. And my grandfather and his, we are going on foot from Obosi to Nnewi, you know. So they, so my father said, my grandfather then told him that it would be quite nice for him, for them to come to Obosi. That they also like to know what they are doing.

CA: Yes.

DC: So they agreed. So he told them, he gave them an idea when they will be coming back to Onitsha. And then they paid him a visit and invited him to Obosi to come and, you know, and preach and, you know, and celebrate his service or mass, you know, as they call it. And then they gave him a space in his compound to do that. And then from that, you know, they started sending people catechisms, you know, to Obosi to, you know, and from there, you know, it kind of goes on into what it is now.

CA: Wow.

DC: You know? Yes.

CA: Did that relationship with the missionary, kind of, did it make your family prominent in those days or like one of the families?

DC: Well, yeah, in a way, yes, it made them quite prominent. Even though my grandfather said, you know, he was not going to be following them to worship anyway. Because he was quite happy with the way he was worshipping his great-grandfather, his whatever, you know, his God, the way he worshiped his God, he was very happy. But his children, he could allow his children to join them and go to school and then, and of course, you know, his children brought their friends, brought their children. You know? And the school kind of took off. The school started.

So it made it prominent in a way, you know, because they were now the center of attraction. Their home was, if you like, you know, the gathering point for the people, for school, and for Sunday service. I said they give them prominence, yes. And of course, you know, that meant that all my grandfather's children went to school. Went to school, some became teachers, that kind of thing. kind of thing and then their children that source also we also able to benefit because from the education, early education yes.

CA: Was it, actually sir, I forgot to ask you what year were you born and how old are you now?

DC: Well, I was born on, I was born in September. 11th September 1942, so I'm 82 years now, plus.

CA: Praise God. That's amazing. Wow. So when you were young, did everyone in your age grade still have the same experience growing up? Because I read a little bit about age grades and how you grow up with your group.

DC: All right. All right. Yes. Naturally. Naturally. Yes. All of us had the same experience growing up. The same chores you have to do at home, you know, like assisting your parents whatever they are doing in farming, in cooking, in fetching water, in fetching firewood, in sweeping the compound, and everybody helped. And of course, you know, that was the way things were at that time. You just had to help your parents. I mean, everybody took it for granted that this was what you have to do. There were no dissents, you know. You just have to do what you have to

do, you know. And that's when the family was kind of brought up, the way the system worked at that time. So all my age mates went through the same process, you know. It's after the primary school that things maybe started changing.. Either they couldn't make, pass any entrance examination to secondary schools or maybe when they passed they didn't have any sponsorship and couldn't pay for the fees. And then they had to, you know, find other things to do. Either go for apprenticeship, you know, or farming, or trading, or whatever. But everybody was just really going through the same process.

CA: What kind of apprenticeship, when you say apprenticeship, what kind of jobs?

DC: Well, apprenticeship as a carpenter, a mechanic, you know. These are the things that were available at that time. Mason for building, you know, or trading, or trading. So these were the apprenticeships, you know, that were kind of more popular at that time, yes.

CA: And when people were paying fees, what were they using to pay money to the schools? Was it the British pound, or was it a different kind of currency?

DC: I can't remember. Well, yes, well, it was called a pound, a Nigerian pound. I think it was tied to the British. I don't know exactly, I don't remember exactly whether. We had Nigerian notes, but in pounds. Nigerian notes in pounds. And I think perhaps, you know, they were equivalent in value to the British.

You know, the value of money was pretty good, you know what I mean? I mean, civil servants were actually paid six pence a month or that kind of thing. And that was enough, you know, to get by. So the value was pretty high. It was pretty good. good, you know, yes. So, and of course, the staple foods at that time, you know, yam, cassava, rice was rare, you know. Rice was a luxury for the rich.

CA: Really?

DC: You know yeah but uh because we can't grow we can't grow rice in our area but of course beans you know we can grow in the farms maybe perhaps you can grow beans you can grow uh or some varieties of beasts like Akidi, you know. These are other legumes you know which we used to eat, you know, so that was it.

CA: Are there any foods that people don't really eat as much now, but people used to eat a lot back then?

DC: Oh, naturally, yeah, they were. In fact, we have forgotten some of our very delicious dishes, you know, because of, may I say, urbanization, or whatever. And then the fact that pretty much everybody is trying to get some is working. Nobody has time anymore. But there were some delicious foods, you know, like, like, now, what do you call ede?

CA: Ete.

DC: Ede. It's a kind of cocoa yam, kind of cocoa yam, you know, kind of cocoa yam. They used to, they used it, you know, mainly for preparing what they call eti ole, which is a thickener for making Onugbu soup and then, you know. But then you know you can also boil it. You don't eat it really, you just use it to make Onugbu. But they can boil it and then leave it overnight or two nights. You know, and then, you know, kind of, you know, to pair it with a lot of vegetables. And it used to be very delicious. And there's still also Ukwa, you know, breadfruit.

CA: Ukwa.

DC: It's still around these days. But they were eating more often those days, too. They were eating more often those days. those days. And then there are things like, you know, egusi soup? The ingredient for making the egusi itself, you know, they used to prepare it a different way, you know, wrap it. You know, with some vegetables, that's slightly bitter, you know, and it's also delicious. And I don't see it anymore. Occasionally, very occasionally, you see it in the market, but it's not common anymore.

So there are so many things, so many different types of food that we usually eat at that time. But people don't prepare anymore because they don't have the time. They don't have the time to prepare them.

CA: Yeah, and are there anything, is there anything that you wish people would remember about that time growing up in the 1940s and 50s before even independence? Anything that you remember?

DC: Well, I think, I think it's important to remember first of all, you know, the discipline, you know, in the family, in the village, you know, there was the security. People leave their things. You can leave your thing open and nobody will touch it. Everybody, they were very hospitable and very friendly. And there was no fear at all of these things we hear these days about poisoning people or being envious of people, there was nothing like that. Everybody drank from the same pot. In fact, when you come into a house, you have an earthenware pot for water. It's just kept by the door of the house with a cover, and a cup. Anybody comes in, takes the cup, opens it in, takes the water, and drinks. And then gives back the cup. Another person will come and use it, no matter whether you are a member of the household or not. Even though water was scarce. But still, people were generous in that and there was no suspicion about anybody poisoning the water.

You come into a house and they're having lunch, you're invited. You wash your hands and you join. You know, there was freedom of movement, there was security, there was love, there was no fear, there was no suspicion, you know. And you know, you didn't envy the other person. He may have more than you are, more than you have, but you didn't envy them. And then, even he

who has more did not look down on you because he had more. You know, people were very open to each other.

Brothers share the same family land, cultivate the same family land, without any fights. Nobody is trying to take the land away from his brother, you know? The kind of things we see now. So it was a very happy period. A very happy period. People were free to go anywhere, enter any house, you know, no suspicion, no suspicion whatsoever. Nobody's afraid of being killed by the other person. And all this nonsense we see these days on television about by native doctors and making their concoctions to kill somebody. It was nothing like that.

And the society punished any wrongdoer. You know, thieves, if you steal somebody's yam, if you go to somebody's farm and steal his yam, they will banish you from the town. And the banishment will be after, they will make you carry the load of yam or cassava that you stole, that you were caught with. You carry it on the head and they'll parade you around the town. And there was nothing more shameful both to you, both to the person who did it and to his family. Than are being paraded, you know, all over town. And then at the end of the day, if it is a yam, if it is yam, you are banished from the town. So that kind of thing, you know, the feeling of shame, remorse, which people don't feel anymore these days. People don't feel remorse anymore these days. People can do anything and then they get away with it. Maybe they get a lawyer, and the lawyer will... ..one reason I can't be a lawyer.

CA: It's okay, it's okay, sir.

DC: And they say he was not totally sane when he was doing that, you know? He was not in control of his actions, that kind of thing. And then he left free. No, that time it was instant justice.

CA: Instant justice.

DC: You know, but the shame, nobody would kill you or anything, but the shame of being paraded in public was enough to deter anybody from doing that kind of thing again. So, those were the days, you know, and these are some of the things that perhaps, you know, we have lost, we have lost now, you know, because people can commit any atrocity. And tomorrow, they may even be president. You know?

CA: Yes.

DC: And people forget, and vote them in. So these are the, some of the good things at that time.

CA: Yes.

DC: You know? Discipline, you know, parental respect, respecting their parents. you know and you know.Yes.

CA: So then that was….

DC: So…..

CA: Yes. Oh no go ahead sir, please.

DC: I beg your pardon?

CA: You were saying?

DC: No, I'm saying this are some of the things that we enjoyed, you know, pre-colonial times and even during colonial times. Pre-colonial times, you know, like I said, the missionaries and the colonial masters, perhaps, you know. The best thing for us was education, of course. Education. But even worship of God. Our people knew God before they came. And worship God. After all, we have Chukwu, and then we have Chi Ukwu. You know, everybody has his own Chi. Chi is everybody's own chi. Your Chi is your God. And the Chukwu who is the big Chi for everybody. And people knew that. And people knew that. The exact Chi is now what you can call it now what they call guardian angels or whatever. And everybody has his own Chi, everybody has his own guardian angel. So our people knew all that. Before the coming of the colonialists, or the coming of the missionaries. And in the pre-colonial, in the colonial times then, they came, of course, with four regions. you know, the North, the East. No, the three regions were started, the North, the East, and the West, you know? Before finally, before eventually they had the Midwest and all that jazz. And then every state had a governor. Every region has its own governor, and then you have a governor at the center, you know? And that kind of thing, yes.

CA: So do you remember, I wonder, Nigeria gained its independence in 1960?

DC: That's correct.

CA: And so you were how old?

DC: In 1960, I was about….

CA: 18, wow.

DC: I was about 18, 18 or so. I was about 18. Yes, I was, I was in, still in secondary school. Yes, and I remember the celebration in Onitsha. When we went to Onitsha, Onitsha every, Onitsha was like the head of the province of our province, Onitsha province. So the celebration was done in Onitsha. Because there was a bigger one in Enugu, which was the capital of Eastern Nigeria. And of course, another bigger one in Lagos, which was the capital. Which was presided

over by, I think it was Princess Alexandria, who represented the queen. represented Queen Elizabeth.

Well, the schools, you know, just went to, we had a march past, you know, and it was a big, big thing, you know, a band playing and so the students, you know, their uniform marching, you know, a parade. It was fun, it was fun. I also remember, I think it was 1956 when Elizabeth was crowned. Then I was still in the primary school. I was in my last year of the primary school. We also went to Onitsha for that parade. And the parade, and it was a lot of fun fair. That's about, it wasn't a holiday. It was a big thing. Because it meant all schools, you know, from the province came. And, you know, their uniforms and marches. So, it was a lot of fun. And, of course, a lot of opportunities to wander around, you know, around the town. And then the town, the townships were big, big. If you are coming from the villages, It was perhaps a rare opportunity to get to a town. I see the lights on and things are light like that. It was good.

CA: So that was the difference between the towns and the villages back then? So the villages they didn't have electricity yet, but the towns had electricity.

DC: The towns had electricity. The villages didn't have electricity. The towns also had a pipe, borne water. Although not very, you know, all over the place. They were mainly, maybe even not in the houses, but they were just public, you know, pumps, you know. You can go and fetch water and things like that. But the villages also had an advantage because the village [towns] didn't have the streams. And then you can go to fetch water and also swim, learn to swim, learn to somersault and things like that we didn't have in the towns. So we had some also advantages over them.

CA: So were there a specific kind of family who chose to live in the town instead of the villages?

DC: Sorry I didn't hear the question.

CA: I said, what different kinds of people would live in the town compared to villages, like who would live in towns?

DC: Well, the people who live in the so-called cities, well, first of all, they were probably traders because there were bigger markets there. Also, some public servants, civil servants and public servants, people who were working, who were working either for the electricity, who were working for the water board, we are working for the civil service, PWD, that's the Power Works Department. It has ministry, what do you call it? Ministry of Power or Ministry of Works. They call it PWD. who were working with the railways and things like that because then there were railways.

CA: Oh, there were railways? There were railways as well. Railways.

DC: Well, the railways were built in the colonial times, you know, the railways. There were railways, you know, I mean, there was railway networking, you know, say, From Enugu then to Kano all the way to Sokoto, and then from Lagos all the way also going to Kano, Sokoto, that kind of thing. It wasn't an extensive network, but it did serve to connect at least mainly the north with the south. You know, it did work. And things like that.

CA: I'm curious now, so how did people meet to do things like marry and things like that? Like what age did people get married?

DC: Okay, right. Well, marriage mainly was by arrangement of the parents or maybe during the various ceremonies you know you can see the ladies dancing and that kind of thing, and you kind of feel some admiration and then you can maybe make inquiries to their parents and their parents and her parents. So it was mainly by kind of arrangement of that nature. You know? Yes.

CA: And about what age did people begin marrying?

DC: It depended, but people in the villages, People didn't tend to marry early because they have to go to farm and a man, a man, a man needed to have his farm and grow his food. And he needed, of course, the support of a wife and then the children, you know, to assist. So people tend to marry fairly early, and they tended to have also many children. Because the more children you have, then the more hands you have, you know, for the farm work. You know, it was really mainly because people were, it was just a subsistence living. They were not farming on big scale because there were no agricultural implements, there were no tractors and that kind of thing. The best you had were hoes and knives and things like that. So you couldn't, you can't cultivate or harvest much with that. So you needed more people, you know. But what they used to do then is that when a man has a farm, you know, the day he wants to maybe weed, perhaps cut the grass, you know, other families will come and help him. And then from there, I also prepare and help the other, and that kind of thing, you know. So they help each other, you know, to do the needful, you know. So, like I said, people were very nice to each other, you know. There was a brotherhood, you know, and sincere, you know, affection, love and affection, you know, and the help to one another was the main thing, you know. Yes.

CA: And how were, in those days, how were elders treated as well? Like, what place did elders have in society?

DC: When the elders, when they get too old to work, when they get too old to work, you know, they, by then, you know, their children are doing enough to produce enough for themselves and for their parents. And moreover, you know, everybody, they all live together in the same, maybe, compound, you know. They may have their own different houses, but in the same compound. So, elders, you know, the wives of the children will cook the food and bring to them, and that kind of thing, you know. And then they had a role too, you know, in telling

stories about the past, you know, to their grandchildren, you know. And also, they also look after the grandchildren when the parents go to work, you know. The grandchildren, they kept in their part, you know. So, everybody, everybody has its role. It worked out very well for everybody.

CA: Do you have any memories of anything that your grandparents might've told you about the past, past, like even in the 1800s.

DC: Unfortunately, I didn't have that luck because first, I didn't know my grandfather and even my father also passed on when I was still very young.

CA: Oh, sorry.

DC: So I didn't have that. But I had uncles, you know, who would tell us the things. I don't remember precisely now, but usually it's more about the cultural things tradition, tradition, traditional things, you know. I don't have good concrete memory because like I said, I didn't have my own father or my mother. Yeah, my mother died when I was only almost 50 anyway, so.

CA: Oh, okay, sorry.

DC: And my grandmother also. My grandmother, I knew my grandmother very well. Yes, we chatted very well. Yes.

CA: So I want to know more about after, when you were growing up, so after you graduated from secondary school, what did you do next?

DC: Okay, I went to secondary school. I went to Christ the King College Onitsha, you know, one of the most popular and famous schools at that time. It was also owned by the Catholic missionaries. So, discipline also was very important. And in fact, the motto of the school was Bonitas Disciplina Scientia which is, Bonitas is goodness, Disciplina is discipline, Scientia is knowledge. So, these were the key things, you know, that the school was concerned about. Goodness as a person. Good character, good behavior. Discipline, as it says, good discipline, respect for elders, respect for your country, for your town. How to behave, how to talk to people respectfully. And then of course knowledge, which is one of the other things he came there, he went there to acquire, you know. So the school was quite good in those respects. And of course, we also believe, you know, that a good body, a good body, good body and good mind were important, you know, for, you know, good, good lives. So exercise was very important, you know, sports was regarded as very, very important, athletics, soccer, they were very, very important. And the school holds on to these attributes, you know, even today, yes, so I, I, I was, it was also a good training ground because I was, I was, I was the Food Prefect. I was, at a tender age, I was in charge of buying the food for the school.

CA: Oh wow.

DC: Every Friday, every Friday I was given money, you know with my team and we went to the market and bought food. Normally we used to buy rice in bulk at the beginning of the year. That was where the big temptation was because the rice vendors always tried to be smart and then they will, they will try to bribe you even at that age.

CA: Oh wow.

DC: They will try to bribe you so that you can keep quiet but because of the discipline I had right from my home primary school secondary school, they couldn't make any headway with me. I refused their money and it's just as well I did because by the end of, because by October we noticed that we were running short of rice that was supposed to last to the end of the year. And then when we made our investigation we found that they were, they had to, they were rebagging the rice so that instead of one full bag, they were probably, they would re-bag it and make it maybe three-quarter full.

CA: Oh.

DC: That kind of thing. So we are basically, we are... It was, we ran short. And because I wasn't in their pay, I had to report them. And they were summarily dismissed, sacked. You know? And that kind of thing. You know, so it was a good training ground for discipline. Unfortunately, the way things are going on in Nigeria now, due to what they are, it was good training. But I believe it was, no matter what it was. I believe it was good training.

CA: Yes.

DC: You know? Because what I see now, what I see now in Nigeria is terrible. Every appointment is an opportunity to steal. It's a pity. Yes, you know, but I guess there are some of us, you know, who refuse to learn that.

CA: Yes.

DC: Yeah, yes, and I don't have any regrets whatsoever. If you knock on my door any time, I will open the door. I don't peep to find out who is coming, whether it's a policeman or... so that's it.

CA: You started, you began school you're maybe in your… What age were you when you finished school?

DC: Okay. Yes. Alright. Yes. I finished primary school in 1956. And I went to CKC Onitsha in 1957. I did my school certificate exam in 1961, which I passed in grade one. And then I did higher school, a two-year program after high school. you know, which is called HSE, Higher School, Secondary School, Higher School. And then I had a Federal Nigerian Government Scholarship to go to Ahmadu Bello University to study Mechanical Engineering.

CA: Oh, wow.

DC: So, I was in Ahmadu Bello for one term between September 1964 and February 1965. And then I got another scholarship, a Commonwealth scholarship, to go to New Zealand.

CA: Wow.

DC: New Zealand, so studying to continue with my mechanical engineering. So I left Ahmadu Bello and went to New Zealand. So I studied in New Zealand.

CA: Wow!

DC: Far away, far, far, far away. It was a lot of fun, you know. It was a lot of fun knowing that that part of the country. It was interesting. I had never been that far away from home. You know, in fact, to travel to New Zealand, I left Lagos for Kano. From Kano, I went to Egypt, Cairo.

CA: Wow.

DC: I stayed a night in Cairo. And then we took a flight and stopped somewhere, stopped in Bangkok, in Thailand, from Bangkok. We got another flight and went to Sydney. First of all, stopped at Sydney, Australia. Then from Sydney, Australia, I went to Wellington, New Zealand. From Wellington, New Zealand, I went to Christchurch, New Zealand, because I went to the University of Canterbury in Christchurch. So that's where I went. I did my engineering there and a Masters of Business Administration there. And then I worked there for, I worked in New Zealand for two years after graduation, you know. So making it about six years in New Zealand as a whole.

CA: Wow.

DC: That was during the Civil War.

CA: Wow.

DC: In 1967, 1968. I finished my BS in 1967. I did my Master's in' 68 and then I worked there till I was '69 and '70. And in' 71, I went to Lusaka, Zambia.

CA: Wow, Lusaka!

DC: I got a job there with the Industrial Development Corporation of Zambia. And I was in Zambia for another six years, you know. I rose to the position of project manager for the conglomerate. And then in 1976, I came back to Nigeria.

CA: Wow!

DC: So it was quite interesting. I travelled a lot of interesting travels. New Zealand is quite a beautiful country. It has two islands. It's based on two islands, the North Island and the South Island. Christchurch is in the South, it's on the North of the South Island. Wellington is on the South of the North Island. And we used to, at that time, we used to go between Christchurch and Wellington by ferry.

There are two boats, as one is coming to Christchurch, the other one is leaving Christchurch and going to Wellington. And, you know, so, and then we also made a beautiful tour around the country. Beautiful scenery, very scenic environment, you know, with hills, you know, and nice topography, you know, lovely, lovely scenery. So I traveled during holidays, you know, I had a friend, you know, from Wellington up to Auckland on the, going by the east coast, and then coming back up by the west coast, you know, and the South Island I traveled quite a lot, up and down, because I was fairly good in tennis at that time. So we used to go to the Copperbelt. Copperbelt is in the south. In the south of the South Island, where they mine copper.

CA: Oh wow.

DCA: You have things like Ndola, Kitwe, you know, and places like that, Mufulira. And we used to go for tennis tournaments and things like that. So it was a lot of fun. As a young man growing up. Yes. And then I was also lucky that the Managing Director of the Industrial Development Corporation I was working with was also Zambia's first mechanical engineer. So he took great a liking for me. So we travelled quite a lot. I was one of his assistants. You know, I traveled extensively, you know, for business negotiations and contracts. And in the process, you know, a bit of tourism too, you know. So, we went to places like, we went to places like Cairo, visited the pyramids. I saw the exhibition of the Tutankhamun, that Tutankhamun was a boy king, who was at the age of nine, and very powerful, and then when he died, you know, the way he was buried.

It's amazing, you know, the civilization, you know, that Egypt had in those early days. In those early days, they made gold, pure gold coffin. You know, pure gold coffin. He was buried, his body was laid in the pure gold coffin. Yes. Another outer coffin contained some of his earthly goods and his bodyguards. The bodyguards actually had to be killed, you know, to be buried with him.

CA: Wow.

DC: And the other act that happened at Egypt, the other act of him was a gold and some welded. You know, some gold, silver and things that he'll be using in the afterlife, as though he was going to need them. So we happened on it and it was a lot of fun and a lot of experience. Wow. Yes, you know.

CA: Wow.

DC: We traveled quite a lot. Yes. Yes. I remember on one particular trip, you know, I was in, I went to Cyprus on my own. And then I met him and one or two other co-workers in Rome. I joined them in Rome. And from Rome, we went to, of course, to Venetia, Florence. And then from there, we went to... I think we flew across, you know, went to the US. From the US, you know, after the US, we went to the West Indies, you know. Kingston, Jamaica. And from there, we flew to Sweden, from Sweden, you know, to Finland. and then back to the UK. It was a lot of fun and a lot of experience, I must tell you, you know, so it was fun, yes, it was great.

CA: Wow, that's amazing, I didn't, I didn't expect that—to hear so many travels.

DC: I talk about that one quite a bit, you know. I went to France. I went to the Eiffel Tower in France, you know, and all those places, you know. We went to LA, went to, went to LA. I went to Disney, Disneyland, you know, and in Disneyland I saw, oh, something that I'll never forget. In a particular room they call the meeting with Mr. President. You come into the room and they draw the, the switch of the lights and then they would draw the curtain on the stage and you see Abraham Lincoln slowly get up from his seat and deliver some fantastic speech. I was so awed. I was so awed by that experience. I didn't know when every other person left the room. I was still sitting there, you know, in awe, you know, and admiration, you know. It was great. It was great, you know.

CA: That's amazing.

DC: I went to the Smithsonian Center and all the places, you know, in Washington. Of course the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, you know, the Watergate, you know. Yes. Yes, the days of Richard Nixon, and you know.

CA: Oh, so this was in the 60s that you were in the U.S.?

DC: Yes.

CA: Wow.

DC: Yes, yes.

CA: Or the 70s.

DC: Yes, no, in the 70s, in the 70s. It was around 1972, around' 72', 73. So, I saw the Watergate, Nixon had left. Nixon had left. He wasn't president at the, you know, that's why the Watergate, you know? And I was, the US was also another place that really amazed me. What amazed me then, you know, was mainly Washington. The massive structures, no high-rises. Not the high rises, but the massive, the massive structure. The water gates, the walls of the water gates look like they were about one or two feet thick. Very heavy, massive structure, you know? Yes. And then of course, you know, the ground of Lincoln Memorial and Jefferson Memorial,

you know, the greens, you know, the peaceful. You know, I was marveled. I was marveled. I was marveled. You know, it was interesting.

CA: And this is really amazing to hear because I don't think that people understand that even then Nigerians were traveling, many Nigerians who traveled.

DC: Oh yes, which I, well, well I was lucky, like I said, my work. You see, in Zambia, for example, this Industrial Development Corporation was a company that was set up by the Zambian government to take, if you like, you know, a partnership, but not just a partnership, but to take, if you like, in a higher interest share in the companies owned, you know, by the colonialists before independence. You see, before independence, everything was owned, you know, by the colonialists. They called this copper mine, all the industries. So the Zambian government, you know, wanted to take ownership. At least take part ownership, like majority ownership to be able to control these events, what was happening in their own place. So at that stage, there were about 72 companies under this Industrial Development Corporation. There were 72 companies. So we had to do all the negotiations, you know, with the various owners, you know, for this ownership, you know, and debt management. So it involved a lot of traveling. A lot of traveling. So the managing director, myself, and the company lawyer, you know, we traveled quite a lot. You know, it was a lot of fun, it was a lot of fun, a lot of experience, that's where, that's where I feel like I got my kicks. Yes, yes.

CA: And so by the time you came back, by the time you returned to Nigeria, it had been how many years since you had left? Almost 12 years or more than that.

DC: Yes, exactly. I was away in New Zealand for six years, and I was away in Zambia for six years, so I was away for 12 years, you know. So it was quite interesting. The main reason why I couldn't come back to Nigeria immediately after graduation was the war, the civil war. Even though the civil war ended in 1967, you know. It was still not a safe ground to start coming. There was still a lot of discrimination against the Igbos, you know. They were being chased out of jobs. So getting a new job was not easy. It was not easy, so I just decided to…

Anyway, luckily at that time, you know, my elder brother, who was a professor of medicine, was also in Zambia…

CA: Oh he was also in Zambia as well?

DC: And he was the president's personal physician.

CA: Wow!

DC: So I had to go to Zambia.

CA: Wow.

DC: So it helped a lot.

CA: So did you go to Zambia because your older brother was the president's physician?

DC: Yes, that's where I first knew about Zambia, for a start, you know. Apart from the fact that a lot of Nigerians were also coming in from the UK to Zambia. Because at that time, Zambia didn't have, for example, any accountant. There was no Zambian accountant. Very few medical doctors. Very few engineers. In fact when I went there, there were only about two Zambian mechanical engineers, my managing director, one, and another chap, you know. So they needed the skills, you know, from Nigerians. So Nigerians, you know, went there. And also, don't forget, you know, that they also recognized Biafra. They recognized Biafra, so it was a friendly state.

CA: A friendly state.

DC: Yes.

CA: So then, what made you decide to finally return to Nigeria?

DC: Well, Nigeria is home. You know, Nigeria is home. My mother was still alive, you know, I was missing her, you know. So, moreover, I wanted to be home. There's no place like home, they used to say. At that time, Nigeria was good. I'm not saying so about now.

CA: Yes.

DC: I'm not saying so about now. You know?

CA: So the year that you returned is 19... this point, 19...

DC: I joined in 1976, I turned to Nigeria in 1976, yes. I joined a company owned by the East. That time there was an East Central State. Not Enugu State, Anambra State, Imu State. It was the East Central State, which covered all the eastern states like Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi. So the company was, if you like, a kind of a mirror of this Industrial Development Corporation which I worked for in Zambia. They were doing fairly similar things like set up new industries, helping industrialists to set up industries and that kind of thing. So it was a kind of a mirror company, a mirror image. So I went there as a project officer, then became a project manager. Then I eventually became the general manager and that kind of thing.

Yes, you know, when I left Zambia, rather, when I left the company to start my own business, I also became the President of the Enugu Chamber of Commerce, that kind of thing. And then from there, in 1998, I decided to try my hand in politics a little bit. And in 1999, I was appointed minister and that kind of thing, so here we are.

CA: And, when in all of this did you get married and where did you decide to settle when you because, did you marry before, yeah?

DC: Yes, I got married when I was in Zambia.

CA: Oh, wow.

DC: I got married in 1975. In January, rather February 1975, precisely on the 25th February 1975 I got married. You know? I had to come to Nigeria to find a wife. And then take her back to Zambia. I didn't want to marry there. I wanted a woman who can speak the same language with my mother.

CA: Yes.

DC: You know? Yes, yes.

CA: Yeah, wow.

DC: You see, is that some kind of parental, you know?

CA: Connection.

DC: Connection, you know, child-parent relationship was still strong. That's the way we were brought up. I wanted her to be comfortable in my house. I wanted my wife also to be comfortable with her.

CA: Yes.

DC: So that's how I got married, yes. Yes.

CA: So then when you returned to Nigeria, did you notice any changes from when you had left? Because before you had left, the civil war had not happened yet. And all these things were different.

DC: Yes, of course. Naturally, there were many, many, many changes. First of all, Nigeria as a country, you know, had grown more busy than it was when I left, you know, on the positive side, you know, for example, that was the time, you know, that on the Carter Bridge and the mainland bridge, you can spend almost one hour, you know, in the traffic jam, you know? Yes, you know, and it was terrible those days, you know? And of course, you know, maybe as a result of the war, insecurity was beginning to be a problem, you know? You know, stealing and rough living are becoming a norm. And people were quite fast about it. For example, the road network for us was very bad, you know. And so the essential infrastructure was not there. For example, to make a call to the US or to outside the country, you had to travel all the way to Lagos to go to Nitel in Lagos. To make a call.

CA: What? To anywhere outside of the country?

DC: To anywhere outside. Because they had only one outlet. In Nitel, in Lagos. You know, I will, I will, then I will fly from Enugu to Lagos. Just to make a call to U.S.

CA: Woah.

DC: I can't believe it. It looks ridiculous. We used to do that. just to make a call. You travel, you travel. But then of course, you know, flights were reasonably cheap at that time, you know, but still. And then after a while, they had another station in Apapa. So if you don't go to the Nitel one along Marina, you go to Apapa just to make a call. Then after some years, you know, they had another link at Enugu. So that stuff, that meant you can do some calls. You can now for Nitel, you know?

CA: Yes.

DC: Yes. Before you start talking about international calls, you know, from your bedroom. which you can do now. You know? But we went through all that, you know? We went through all that. It was incredible. It was incredible. And then, I learned a lot of things, you know. Then the import licenses, during the time of import license. Sometimes I had to travel. from Enugu by road to Lagos just to chase an import license to try to get an import license. On one particular occasion, I remember I got to Lagos, checked into the Ikoyi hotel. I went to the ministry and there were some documents I didn't have, which they needed.

CA: Oh no.

DC: The following day, I drove back to Enugu. And on the third day, I drove back to Lagos.

CA: Oh, that's so much.

DC: With the documents. Still there's no guarantee I get it back.

CA: That's so much.

DC: So you get to see the kind of, I would say trauma, but definitely hardship we faced at that time, you know, hardship we faced at that time, to get the import license. I'm glad they banned the damn thing now. It was unnecessary. So, imposing those import licenses was unnecessary. But that was what they used to do also to get money. Because you bribed them to be able to get the import license. And then they can favor their friends by giving them the import license. Those days, people who were not in any way doing business were getting import licenses and they're selling it to businessmen. You know?

CA: Yes.

DC: So we went through a lot. You know? We went through a lot. You know? Yes. So there are a lot of changes, a lot of changes. A lot, a lot, lots and lots of changes that have occurred, actually.

CA: And did you keep in touch with a lot of the people you grew up with before you had left the country to go to school and to work?

DC: Yes, I kept in touch with some of my classmates. Even now, the few of them who are still alive, we keep in touch. We call each other from time to time, you know, yes, you know. Well naturally of course those that I left after primary school where it was a little bit difficult, you know? For some of them who didn't have the opportunity to further their education. It was a bit difficult because the gap had widened and naturally some of them felt a bit shy to come close. But a few that came close, are still good friends. A lot of them have died anyway. But those who are still alive, there are a few that are still very close. Some of my best friends are the friends I made in secondary school.

CA: Yes.

DC: We chat at least once a week, you know? You know, that kind of them.

CA: That's amazing. And if any of them are interested in also sharing their oral history, feel free to connect me.

DC: Huh?

CA: If any of them would also like to share their stories as well, I'd love to chat with them. Yes.

DC: You'll love to chat with them?

CA: Yes.

DC: Okay, let me call one of them who is based in Enugu. I'll talk to him and then I'll send you across his number, yeah? Okay.

CA: That'd be good. Right. Thank you.

DC: But is there any other question you ask, no problem.

CA: Yes. I wanted to know if there's anything else you wanted to share about your memories in Nigeria that we haven't covered. Especially, yeah. Anything that people maybe would not know if you won't, if you don't say it.

DC: No, it's always difficult to-.

CA: Just remember.

DC: To just remember these things unless you are prompted, you know?

CA: Yes.

DC: Yes, if you are prompted, then you remember.

CA: Hmm, let me see.

DC: Otherwise, I don't know.

CA: Well, there's a question that I had about even as someone who was involved in engineering, but also business and things, how did it feel to experience all of those different shifts between military government, democratic government, kind of all of the shifts and changes in Nigeria's government over time. Was it chaotic? Did you expect it? Kind of all of these changes, I guess, and since 1999, it's been civilian rule, but there's a lot of military shifts.

DC: Yeah. Yeah, well, in my opinion, it is really, it is a shame that we ever got involved with the military government. It's unfortunate. Because not only did the military come uninvited, but really they have never left. They have not left, they are still there. Because, you know, they are coming to change the entire landscape of governance in Nigeria. You see the military, they are not democratic. It's not a democratic institution. It's a command and control. And even when they remove the gap, the military gap, that attitude is still there, command and control.

Even the ones among them that are generally talked about as good leaders are a shadow of good leadership. They are not really good leaders. But that autocratic nature is still with them. And that is what has changed the landscape of Nigeria. The military came in and Murtala Mohammed, well, we're not Murtala Mohammed actually, but Agunyi Ironsi. He came in as the first military ruler after the coup. You know? And then... He converted, he wanted to convert Nigeria into a unitary government, without consensus, but by fiat. Even though his fellow officers didn't allow him, they killed him and removed him, and brought in Gowon. Gowon came, created more states. Tried to negotiate with Ojukwu, the Biafran leader at the governor then of Eastern Nigeria. After the program, the East decided to secede and form Biafra.

Because, again, they were not civilian, they were military. When he got back to, when Gowon went back to Lagos, and he found that he made a lousy agreement, he abrogated the agreement. Again, without consensus, and that led to war. Even after the war, he said no victor, no vanquish. But what we know it is not true. The Igbos were regarded as people who were defeated. Up to now, they have not gained their rights in Nigeria. It is almost, if you like, you know, a terrible disadvantage to be a Igbo man in Nigeria now. Nothing the Igbo man does is right. The Igbo man is independent. He survives on his own. Even that is annoying to the others. Why should he survive? Why is he so independent? Anything, you know, that was developed

during Biafra that could have been used, you know, to develop Nigeria. They have swept under the carpets because they don't want any glory.

CA: Like what?

DC: To go to Nigeria, to go to Ndi Igbo.

CA: Like what kind of?

DC: Like the Obinigwe**,** for example, which could have been refined into bombs, things like that. Like the Biafrans were refining petroleum from crude metals, that could have been refined. And industry started based on their technology. They didn't want to do that. We're importing, we're still importing technology from everywhere, anywhere, everywhere. At very, especially at more than 10 times the price.

So these are the problems. So these are, these are the, you like the, the disadvantages of the military ever getting involved at all in governance, they have kept on recycling themselves, you know. In 1999, Obasanjo, after Obasanjo, he didn't even allow democracy to prevail. He made sure, you know, that he himself appointed Yaradua, who was a very sick man. The whole idea is that perhaps being sick he could control him. The person who was to be his vice-president, Peter Odili, was dropped off at the last moment because he is Igbo from the Rivers. Instead they brought Ebele Jonathan, who was not even prepared and didn't even want the job. Again, this is Obasanjo's doing.

I sat under him. But I have to speak the truth. Because of his control. His love for control. That's what has led us into all this. into, first of all, Yaradua who was sick and was not even keen to join a time who was not keen to be, you know, and then, and that brought us back, you know, to Buhari, who should never have been anywhere near leadership. And did anything he liked to do. There was no respect for law, for rule of law. The National Assembly, they can be bought with whose money? Nigeria's money. So the whole thing is a mess, really. And it all started with having the military.

When the civilians were there, Michael Okpara was the governor of Eastern Nigeria. He didn't even have a house in the village. He didn't build a house in the village. Tafawa Balewa, who was prime minister, did not build a house in his village. They didn't have the money to do that. But now, today appointing, appoint somebody president, there is no difference between his private money and the country's money. He does anything he likes. No checks, no balances. So the military government is the worst thing that can happen to any country. So there is no comparison between military and civilian. Real civilian government. I mean, not the ones we have in Nigeria, you know.

CA: Do you think that there's a chance that we can get back to real civilian government and is there a way forward?

DC: I would like to think there's a way forward, but I'm not really very confident about it. I don't think it will happen in my time. Let's hope it will happen in my children's time. Or that the country will split up. Because really, at the moment, as a very thin thread holding the country together. That thread can snap any time.

You see, Nigerians have never hated each other as they do now. You know, it's a pity. But I remember when I was a kid the mayor of Enugu, the whole Enugu town, the capital of Eastern Nigeria, the mayor was a Fulani man. And people, it was the people, the Igbos who voted for him. There were Igbos who were council members in Lagos, even Kano. In fact, Okonkwo Kano was a member of the Northern House of Assembly. But they're there, voted by both the Igbos and the Hausas. You know? It cannot happen now. It cannot happen now. You cannot have a Fulani man as a governor of, I mean, as a mayor of Enugu now. It's not possible. Nor can you have an Igbo man as a governor of Lagos State. It's not possible anymore. In those days it was possible because people didn't pay too much attention to tribes. People saw themselves as Nigerians. And once you perform well, you relate well, people will vote for you. It can't happen anymore. So, these are the problems of Africa. It's unfortunate, it is time, but let's hope. Let's hope by my children's children, you know, we can see a better Nigeria.

CA: Amen. I really enjoy talking. I love, I really enjoy talking to you, sir.

DC: Thank you my dear, it's a pleasure.

CA: It's been really lovely.

DC: Yes, and I understand you are a granddaughter of Ekenedilichukwu?

CA: Yes, I am.

DC: I knew him. Yeah, this is as far as the small world, yeah.

CA: Yeah, what was he like? Huh? What was he like?

DC: He was a good, he was a good jovial man. He was a good jovial man. Kind, generous, you know? Yes.

CA: Wow.

DC: And a good businessman, and a good businessman.

CA: Yeah. It's a shame, it's a shame that the business is no more, but...

DC: Yeah. Yeah, so you take care?

CA: Okay, thank you so much, sir. Take care. God bless you.

DC: It's a pleasure, it's a pleasure. You take care?

CA: Yes, I'll see you. Have a good evening, sir.

DC: Okay, my dear. Bye-bye.

CA: Bye. Kachifo.

DC: Kachifo, good. I'm going to end it right there. Bye!

CA: Bye!