

*On the
road to*
50

**A Collection of
Inside Stories**

**Co-ordinated by
Azu Ishiekwene**



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Foreword

Wow! The period 1980 to 1986 was just like yesterday!! Then Louis and I were both sojourners at Victory College, Ikare-Akoko, Ondo State. One was a student, the other an ex-student; one a bookworm in class, the other, the Principal of the College and Louis' Literature in English language instructor.

Just a short while ago, I got to know that Louis is a March boy. Incidentally, I too came in March. Like a "lad of Fame", Louis fought to come ahead of me, but because he was constrained by respect for his senior, he yielded two days. That is why I am March 23, and he is March 25.

Some minerals are epochal. There is the SILVER associated with 25 years. There is the one that stands for 50, which is GOLD. And, there is the third one, DIAMOND that strikes the note of 60. They are all precious stones. While silver is seen as rough and unripe, gold is regarded as an epitome of success, and enduring. With diamond, degeneration begins.

Louis, my dear boy, you are gold at 50! My wife and I join your very many admirers, who have put these reflections together in celebrating you. Within the short time being recounted, you have scaled, like a stallion, life's very difficult hurdles and earned gold in your chosen career as a man of letters and in your private life, while - like those in your age bracket - battling for contentment.

You have, indeed, impressed me. And I am very proud of you. However, the race is not over, yet. Yes, in line with our College motto, it is still *Laboramus Expectantes*; we are working ceaselessly, and expecting until the last minute.

The race is still gathering momentum. But with determination, strength of character, and a “positive age belief”, even after crossing the bar of the diamond years, the journey ahead will be achieved as if like a child’s play.

CONGRATULATIONS.

Basorun Seinde Arogbofa, OFR, PEN, FSPSP, FNIPR, is a playwright, poet, and essayist. He is the Asiwaju of Oka-Akoko, erstwhile secretary general of Afenifere, and pioneer Chairman, Governing Council, Federal University, Lafia.

March 16, 2023.

Prologue

All Capacity, no Spare

He smelt conspiracy was afoot, even before it was hatched. A man used to giving but often reluctant in asking or receiving, he called a number of his close friends, weeks before his 50th birthday, to say he would like to have a quiet birthday.

“Capacity!” Louis Osaretin Odion called me in guttural baritone, sometime in early February, “some people have been whispering about throwing a party to mark my 50th birthday. Please if any of them calls you, tell them I’m not interested. I’d like to have a quiet day, on the day.”

Ten years ago, when he was 40, we tried this quiet business. On that occasion, however, modesty was overrun by the outpouring and goodwill of friends and family. It was not a quiet celebration at all.

It’s rare to pack so much capacity into 50 years, to affect lives so profoundly as Odion has done, and still hope to be spared jollification on one’s golden jubilee.

This time, however, we have taken precaution if not to oblige him by making it quieter, to at least, deepen and make it more memorable. That was how we came about the idea of a collection of testimonials by a few of his friends to mark the day.

This is by no means a definitive work on Louis Osaretin Odion, a man of exceptional parts – amateur boxer, stenographer, literary agent, cognoscenti, multiple award winner, fellow of the guild of editors, connoisseur and journalist.

I think I speak for Tunji Bello, Kayode Komolafe, Victor Ifijeh, Sam Omatseye, Eric Osagie, Olusegun Adeniyi, Festus Keyamo (SAN), Ita Christian, and Andrew Odion, fellow collaborators in this conspiracy of defiance when I say you have not heard the last of Capacity at 50!

Our profound gratitude to Chief Seinde Arogbofa, Louis' former school principal, who was conscripted at the very last minute to write the Foreword, which he so graciously did. And also to the numerous friends and family members of Odion who either contributed to making this collection or would have been more than delighted to do so, if they had been contacted.

There will be many, many more interventions of this kind that Louis Osaretin Odion so richly deserves!

Long, happy and well may you live!

Azu Ishiekwene

March 17, 2023

Ode To the Best Man



By Olusegun Adeniyi

At a wedding, the best man is more than just the lead groomsman, according to Kim Forrest, Senior Editor at The Knot Worldwide, and a former Associate Bridal Editor at *Washingtonian* magazine. There are numerous duties that are unique to the role, “namely to be the groom’s go-to confidante, personal valet and logistics guru for pre-wedding events and day-of details,” Forrest says. Essentially, “it’s really all about supporting the groom during the wedding-planning process and on the big day... Usually a close friend or relative, this person is asked to stand by the groom’s side to support and assist in any way possible before and during the wedding.”

Perhaps more than any other person, I know the significance of having someone like Louis Odion as the Best Man. On my wedding day on 19th December 1998, it was almost as if the role was created for Louis and looking back, I don’t know what could have happened had he not been there for me that day. As the wedding progressed and the bride was nowhere to be found, Louis became a bouncer, counsellor, motivational speaker, and enforcer all rolled into one.

The story of my wedding is, of course, already well-documented that I need not repeat it here. But it is a day that will forever be etched in my memory and for which I am grateful to Louis. Incidentally, I didn't choose Louis for the role of Best Man. The role chose him. Yes, we worked together in the same office. But we had also become more like brothers. So, it was quite natural that we planned the wedding together. And when I needed him the most on the big day, he came through for me.

In the journey of life, each one of us knows those who we can count on to stand with us, while showing us in big and small ways that they are with us and for us, no matter the circumstance. I have learnt over almost three decades that having Louis on my side helps. On several occasions, he has demonstrated dependability, not only through his words, but more so through his actions. And I know several other people (young and old) who also say that of him.

On the professional side, if Louis were not a journalist, he probably would have been a boxer, a sport he loves so much. That also reflects in his writings. He throws punches. Sometimes heavy punches, especially against those who cross his path. But let me clarify that. In the Nigerian public sphere these days, what we often witness when a writer or speaker disagrees with someone's argument is an abusive response. This has become so normalised that a spectacle of insults or toxic discourse now substitutes for meaningful conversation on social media. That is not Louis' style. He will productively engage with, while seeking to knock out his opponents, in the way his boxing hero, the late Muhammad Ali, used to do. But with powerful words and strong arguments.

The 50th is a milestone birthday and I hope Louis understands its import. It is a time to reflect on the journey so far, and he has a lot to thank God for. I should know. But what lies ahead is just as important. For sure, Louis is not among weak men who, according to the 19th century American inspirational author and publisher, Orison Swett Marden, wait for opportunities. He is among the strong men who make them. That's what has propelled Louis to what he is today. By dint of hard work. And the abiding grace of God.

For me, Louis has been a generous person and I am fortunate to have him as a friend. Therefore, on a day such as this, especially as he joins the Quinquagenarian Club, I can only wish him long life and good health.

Happy birthday, my brother.

Olusegun Adeniyi, a writer and former presidential spokesman, is currently the chairman of ThisDay's Editorial Board

For Louis Odion “The Baddest” at 50



By Festus Keyamo

Like a dexterous mountain climber, Mr. Louis Odion, Senior Technical Assistant on Media to the President (Office of the Vice President) – my friend, brother and confidant (that is why we call ourselves “the baddest”) – has slowly, but surely, inched his way up the ladder of his profession and also to the golden age of 50.

Young, starry-eyed and bubbly with life and expectations, we both met ourselves more than thirty years ago in Lagos State. I was just a young graduate from the University about to proceed to the Law School and he was a cub reporter at the *Concord* newspapers. Instantly, the fire in our bellies was the magnet that made us gravitate towards each other and we have not looked back till date. I was to be his best man at his wedding years later.

Louis didn’t earn the sobriquet “Mr. Capacity” for picking up cottons. Highly cerebral and conscientious, he lifted himself by his own bootstraps all the way from private life to public

office, where he has distinguished and acquitted himself with aplomb. We both saw ourselves (and almost concurrently) make significant progress in our individual professions, step by step, all the way to the modest successes we have achieved today.

On a personal level, our interactions over the years have oscillated between sharing very light moments and spending time dissecting very serious social and political situations in our country. Louis is blessed with a sharp, analytical mind, and with the requisite vocabulary to express those thoughts, especially in his now famous weekly columns, over the years.

As “the Baddest” clocks 50, I pay special tribute to a special friend and a special brother; to a man who has risen from humble beginnings to the dizzy heights of his career; a man with a gusto for writing beautiful prose and an uncommon journalistic prowess.

A tribute to Mr. Capacity!

Festus Keyamo (SAN) is a Senior Advocate of Nigeria; a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitration, UK; Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Federal Republic of Nigeria; and Director, Public Affairs and Chief Spokesperson to the President-Elect.

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Louis The Faithful Brother My Parents Never Had



By Tunji Bello

It was a bright day in the late summer of 1991. As the Group Political Editor of the *Concord* newspapers, I had been following the series of political articles contributed to our publications from outside. There was one particular writer that I developed an interest in. The person was Louis Odion. I had asked my Deputy then, the serial literary award winner, Sam Omatseye, who this Louis Odion was, and where does he write from?

Sam said he had just discovered that the young man was working in our Advertisement Department. Immediately, I walked out of my office to the Advert Department on the ground floor. On getting there, I asked who Louis Odion was and he stood up to identify himself. I didn't say a word but walked up to the Advertisement Manager, Mrs. Tola Adesanya and asked her if she would allow me to seek the transfer of Louis to my department, while giving her the reasons for this.

Wonderful woman! She did not object. It was after I left her that I went back to Louis to inform him of his impending transfer to

the Political Desk in a few days and his change of designation to Political Reporter, which signalled the commencement of Louis' journey as a journalist.

Louis resumed the following week and everyone welcomed him as a member of the Political Desk family, even though he had no reportorial experience, but was attached to one of our most experienced political correspondents since the Second Republic. Before we knew it, Louis had adapted quite easily. Apart from his writing skills, which were most profound, his brilliance, analytical skills, friendly disposition and inquisitive attribute, which combined with new learning skills in political reporting, were awesome. This made me to take special interest in him.

In the first place, we had broken a rule to have him. No one was allowed onto our Political Desk without a university degree. Louis had an OND from a Polytechnic, hence he was informed that he urgently needed to further his education and attain a university degree while still working. Luckily, he got a direct entry admission into the University of Lagos through JAMB. In three years, he graduated with a second class (upper division) Bachelor's degree in English, while at the same time working hard and commendably as a Political Reporter. Two years after, he received his Master's degree in English.

The most interesting thing is that Louis and I became very close that there was nothing going on in his family that he didn't tell me. We became brothers and I found him very dependable on any mission. His main partner was another Media Merit Award Winner, Segun Adeniyi, who joined our Desk from *African Concord*. With this combination (Odion and Segun),

our Political Desk became unstoppable and unrivalled. To crown it all, we had also recruited from *PUNCH* newspapers, one of its brilliant political correspondents, Victor Ifijeh, currently the MD/Editor-in-Chief of the highly flying *The Nation* newspapers.

Louis' reliability and loyalty to a cause became manifest during the June 12 crisis. Despite his private and family needs and the hardship created by the June 12 imbroglio, following the closure of *Concord* newspapers by military juntas, Louis remained one of those committed staff who stood firmly with us. Even when he was persuaded to work for another newspaper temporarily and just to survive, he was the first to resign and return to us when *Concord* was reopened by the late dictator, General Sani Abacha in November 1995.

Louis eventually moved to *ThisDay* newspapers, where he served as a Deputy Editor before he finally attained the position of the founding Sunday Editor of *The Sun* newspapers, of which I was one of the three consultants, including the revered Mike Awoyinfa and late Dimgba Igwe, who helped Senator Orji Kalu in setting it up.

It was no surprise that Louis became a star amongst the Editors. His Sunday paper became the bestselling in the group. This further complimented his previous Nigerian Media Merit Awards (NMMA) and other awards. Thus, no one was surprised when he was eventually crowned with the FNGE, as a fellow of the Nigerian Guild of Editors.

Eventually, Louis was to join his older friend and brother in politics. When he left *The Sun* newspapers as Sunday Editor,

despite several appeals by the management to make him stay, we gradually dragged him into the politics of his State. When Adams Oshiomole was inaugurated as Edo State Governor, he needed a good information manager. Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu had asked me to discuss with Louis an offer to be Commissioner but he declined this. It was two years later when the Governor was still not satisfied with his information management that Asiwaju summoned Louis himself and persuaded him to take the offer. He eventually took it and served creditably, but he resigned for family reasons before the end of Governor Adam Oshiomole's second term tenure.

We remain very close till this moment and share daily information, knowledge and ideas about politics and our country's progress extensively. Our families remain one, living as neighbours.

It is the hallmark of honour to celebrate such a wonderful and ever reliable brother, whose intellectual standing, hard work, brilliant writing skills, principled stand on national issues, progressive thinking, morals, upright pedigree and ever reliable conduct on issues have advanced the society.

He is celebrated at 50. May he live long!

Tunji Bello was former Editor of National Concord; Chairman, Editorial Board of ThisDay newspapers and Secretary to the Lagos State Government. He currently serves as Honourable Commissioner for the Environment and Water Resources in Lagos State.

Louis Odion: The matter of Capacity



By Azu Ishiekwene

Sometimes it feels like we have been childhood friends. That we have known each other forever. For over 30 years since our paths crossed, I can't remember how many times I've called him "Louis," much less "Louis Osaretin Odion."

Even now, it feels awkward to write it. I call him by the name that the closest circle of his friends has come to know and call him for nearly three decades: "Capacity!"

And that's what he calls me too, even though he retains the proprietary right to the moniker. He earned it from the odysseys of a life of sailing against the wind when many of his mates walked a road paved with comfort and relative safety.

His struggles through early school life in Ikare Akoko, Ondo State (where his parents stayed after leaving Edo, then Bendel State), his decision to set forth early to fend for himself and make his own luck by accepting and applying himself even in

lowly jobs, and his abiding faith in a future that rewards hard work and diligence, all combined to toughen his resilience.

These experiences have done at least two things for him. One, they have given him wisdom beyond his years. It sometimes feels like he was 50 long ago. And two, his experiences have not only benefited him, they have also strengthened his shoulder for many who would lean on him along life's journey.

I've been one of them. Even though Capacity started out first as a stenographer in *Concord* newspapers in the early 1990s, we didn't know each other well until he began to make editorial contributions to the Op-ed pages and later, the back page of what was then one of Nigeria's most prestigious newspapers.

It was a matter of sheer serendipity and generosity of heart that Tunji Bello, the Group Political Editor of *Concord* at the time spotted Capacity, encouraged him to get a university degree and later redeployed him from secretarial duties to the editorial department of *Concord*. But I still didn't know Capacity well enough at the time.

We began to bond more closely around 1995 when he moved to *ThisDay*, after the closure of *Concord* and following General Sani Abacha's assault on the press, and particularly on MKO Abiola, who was detained unto death after he won the 1993 presidential election.

At *ThisDay*, Capacity started a weekly column, "Bottomline", which soon became a national must read. Week after week, he brought to bear on his commentary a rare quality of insight and fearlessness which kept his growing fan base locked in and the political elite on edge.

Capacity was a columnist that other columnists had to read, especially on politics and current affairs. One particular article in 2002 bears recalling. Entitled, “Before the Babangida candidacy”, Capacity had taken on a faceless writer whose article was published in *ThisDay*, promoting the candidacy of military president Ibrahim Babangida.

After claiming he had stepped aside, Babangida was obviously still toying with the idea of running for the presidency exactly 10 years after he annulled the 12 June, 1993 election and was forced out by General Abacha.

In his usual bang-on-the-nail style, Capacity hammered the hack writer, saying that even if the devil had tempted Babangida and he couldn’t summon the will to say no, he ought to have borrowed the sense of shame to resist it.

Two prominent pro-Babangida acolytes and public intellectuals descended on Capacity in a co-authored rejoinder. They attacked his motive, insisting that Babangida was exactly what a broken, wounded country needed. Then the fireworks began. The June 12 faithful-in-residence at *ThisDay*, led by Bello, Kayode Komolafe, Sam Omatseye and Waziri Adio, launched a counterattack.

For me as Editor of *Saturday PUNCH* at the time, and a columnist too, it was riveting punditry and entertainment. I recall Bello accusing the two pro-Babangida public intellectuals who were in their fifties at the time, of “ganging up to silence a ‘small boy’!”

I was later informed that *ThisDay* Chairman and Publisher, Nduka Obaigbena, was obliged to call a truce, which also

effectively signaled the end of the editorial road for the pro-Babangida merchants hoping to deploy the newspaper in the service of their principal.

This fearless quality of attacking injustice or hubris, which he showed early in his career, remains the hallmark of his journalism. We sometimes joke that it is a carry-over from his unfinished career as an amateur boxer. Anyone who knows Capacity knows he doesn't choose his battles carelessly. He is a fighter you would rather have in your corner.

My interest in his work and our bond deepened after he left *ThisDay* as Deputy Editor and joined *SUN* in 2002 as the first Editor of its Sunday title. To be a title editor in *SUN* on the watch of the exceptional Mike Awoyinfa and Dimgba Igwe, ex-*Concord* staff members and *SUN* top guns, who made *Weekend Concord* a soar away brand, was quite a task.

As Editor of a weekend newspaper myself, I watched *Sunday SUN* initially struggle to define its identity - a cross between a wannabe red top and something a bit more serious. And then, as Capacity grew into the job, the brand slowly pulled away to become one of the most authoritative newspapers for political interviews and consequential stories. It forced me to reset *Saturday PUNCH*. I think my friend and *Sunday PUNCH* Editor at the time, Remi Ibitola, also did the same.

But it was not until after Capacity's tour of duty at *SUN* and later, *National Life* (where he was Managing Director/Editor-In-Chief), that we became really close.

As MD/Editor-In-Chief, he was now straddling the delicate and often potentially hazardous line between the business and editorial survival of the new title. It's not what you find

in journalism textbooks. Well-funded newspaper companies abroad are protected from such miseries, too. Their editorial departments are walled off from the business side of the operations.

In a typical newspaper organisation in Nigeria, however, the MD/Editor-In-Chief is – or has to be – an expert at everything from circulation to advertising and from editorial content to digital marketing, if he or she really wants the business to survive.

As Controller at the time, I was also involved in the business aspects of newspaper operations at *PUNCH*. It was while Capacity was trying to find his footing, not as an editorial man this time, but also as a business manager, that he began to knock on my door more often, to compare notes.

Later, we worked together on a few entrepreneurial ventures, one or two of which we got our fingers burnt, but all of which only further deepened our bond of friendship.

When he accepted to work as Commissioner of Information in his home state, Edo, under Governor Adams Oshiomhole, he did so with great reluctance. Capacity has no patience for bureaucracy, the worst kind of which is the mainstay of public service in Nigeria. Even though his job as a journalist has forced him in the public eye, he remains an intensely private man.

Above everything else, accepting the job meant dividing his time and attention between Lagos and Benin, perhaps for eight straight years? He was concerned about the effect of the job on his mother whom he remains deeply fond of, and also his young family.

Yet, never one for half measures, once he took the job, he took it, at a great personal cost. He brought to his office extraordinary goodwill, professionalism and competence, for which he earned great respect and admiration.

I used to tease him that he is one of the few public officers who drove around without a police orderly, even though he had one, and quite often spent his own money to run the office.

Outsiders who didn't understand his misery hardly flinched from pressing their demands, mostly financial, on the "Honourable Commissioner" to "do something." He tried but when he had had enough, he resigned voluntarily mid-way into Oshiomhole's second term in 2015 and in spite of pressure to stay on.

His appointment in August 2019 as Senior Technical Assistant on Media to the President (under the office of the Vice President), is well known. But positions have never been what binds us. At core, we share a deep, filial bond for family, profession, faith and justice.

Capacity has an extraordinary network of friends and contacts across age, tribal and occupational lines, whose loyalty and friendship he covets. Still, he maintains that space, which Germans call *lebensraum*, that allows him to enjoy the respect, loyalty and confidence of friends, and yet keep his privacy.

If as Andrew Marr says, every editor needs an editor, Capacity is mine. He has been for as long as I can remember. He is often among my last "gatekeepers," adding insight, challenging arguments and re-drafting awkward sentences.

And the owl that he is, I've sent my articles to him, week after week, for the last over 20 years, and have gone to bed only to wake up to his feedback in the morning. This is one of the very few editions I won't share with him before press. I can't be grateful enough for his labours of friendship in good times and in bad.

Since he insists that he is just 50, I'll have to accept. But by my reckoning, which of course is not just a number, he has gifts far, far beyond his years!

Azu Ishiekwene is a journalist of over 35 years. He was a member and chairman of the CNN Multichoice African journalists judging panel, member of the Board of the World Editors Forum, and Global Editors Network and one of Nigeria's and Africa's most syndicated columnists. He is currently the Editor-In-Chief of LEADERSHIP, an Abuja-based newspaper, and a fellow of the Nigerian Guild of Editors.

No Half Measures



By Kayode Komolafe

Albert Einstein, the greatest scientist of the last century, famously said: “I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” Einstein must have been in an extremely modest mood when he made that statement, given his pre-eminent position as a scientist in a century that was defined by science. The point made by Einstein is that passion could indeed drive one on the path to greatness. Einstein’s curiosity that led to the theory of relativity was driven by passion.

For Louis Odion, passion has been a driver of activities in life. From whichever perspective you view his development as a human being, a stupendous amount of passion becomes conspicuous in the picture. You cannot claim to know Louis without noticing his passion in different situations. By the way, the synonyms of the word “passion” employed in this context include energy, vigour, intensity, fire, commitment and spiritedness. Louis’ life is a demonstration of a lot of these attributes.

In whatever venture Louis is involved, he readily summons tremendous energy in physical, mental and other forms. This

unique combination paid off handsomely in the formative stages of Louis' professional career as a distinguished journalist and public intellectual. Many of his senior colleagues at the Concord Group of Newspapers would readily testify to his phenomenal rise.

Louis is hardworking and resilient in the pursuit of his goals. This easy deployment of energy in any situation in which he finds himself, is probably what has earned him the sobriquet, "Capacity." Once Louis is on board in any project, you could be sure of his total commitment.

The first evidence of passion is in the manner in which he tells his life story. He has done so clinically on many occasions, with full disclosure, expressing profuse appreciation to those who have been positive factors to him, while climbing the ladder of life. In the world of Louis, to borrow the words of the French existentialist Philosopher and writer, Jean Paul Sartre, "we must act out passion before we can feel it." Friends and critics of Louis would readily testify to the fact that he acts out his passion with an unmistakable intensity. So, you cannot but feel the passion of Louis if your path crosses his own.

In any battle, it's safer to have Louis on your side, instead of being your opponent because when he embarks on a mission, he knows no half measures. It is better to encounter his expansive laughter than to be the target of his fury. Hence, he is viewed by even close friends as a "worthy ally and a deadly foe!"

However, the beauty of Louis' world outlook is simply that on any issue, you would know exactly where you stand with the man, even when you fundamentally disagree with his position. He marshals his points, no holds barred, in his

many controversies, some of which, according to him, “are imposed” on him as an interlocutor.

Louis is an ardent devotee of fidelity to friendship. He defends his friends with all the energy at his disposal in their absence. He is richly gifted with the virtue of cherishing bonds. He relates to people in different dimensions. As the life custodian of the “crude oil” domiciled in the secretariat of “OPEC”, a cartel whose members you can count on your fingers, Louis dramatises the strictly private affairs of the “organisation” in a way that makes observers suspect that it is a cult. Again, passion is brought to bear even on light-hearted matters. In a bilateral relationship with me, I call Louis “constituency man”, while he calls me “comrade,” a title which he often translates libellously as “come and raid.” I began calling him “constituency man” when we both lived in the Mushin Local Government Area. We were members of the same federal constituency, so to say. After closing late at *Concord*, and following our holding of the mandatory “OPEC sessions,” Louis and I were bound to head in the same direction in one official jalopy. Even in very tense situations, Louis would exude so much warmth that would make you forget the adversity of your environment. From being professional colleagues, we have become family friends.

As he attains the Golden Age, Louis, doubtless, deserves all the accolades as a bright professional and highly resourceful personality.

This tribute would, however, not be judicious enough if I fail to take the liberty of being his elder brother to drop some exhortation on him. As pointed out briefly in the foregoing, Louis’ passion typically comes to the fore, whether in agreement or disagreement with other persons.

Louis speaks Yoruba with an Ikare accent, having had his childhood in the Akoko area of Ondo State. So, he should not have any problem reflecting on the old Yoruba aphorism: “Ti a ba ndgba, se ni a y’ogun ja” (Age should temper one’s reaction to situations). In other words, the older one gets, the more forbearance one should have in life. After all, by the grace of God, in just a decade from now, he will be celebrating his Diamond Jubilee, which is an ascension to the realm of elders.

Whenever I urge Louis to exercise restraint in understandably difficult moments, his refrain has usually been: “Comrade, I am not a diplomat like you and you know me.” And my response is often that, “I am a revolutionary diplomat and I know as a Marxist that even in fierce revolutionary situations, the tool of diplomacy could be useful.”

As he counts his blessings in life on this occasion of his Golden Jubilee, Louis should eschew bitterness and be more forgiving of all those who might have wronged him in the journey of life.

Warmest congratulations to Louis, the quintessential Edo man, on his 50th Birthday.

May he live to celebrate his Centenary and more in good health and joy.

Kayode Komolafe (KK) is Ombudsman of the THISDAY/ARISE Media Group and Executive Group Executive Director of ThisDay Newspapers Ltd. Before joining ThisDay, he has held editorial positions at The Guardian, News/Tempo and Concord. A former officer of the Nigerian Union Journalists (NUJ), he was a member of the Governing Board of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The Consummate Professional



By Victor Ifijeh

Full of vigour and zest, Louis Odion came into journalism with high hopes and a desire to excel. With humility, hard work and dedication, he shot into prominence. He won laurels. Fame, recognition beckoned. The high and the mighty appreciated him. He became a person sought after by people in high offices desirous of shoring up their public images. Within a short space of time, the struggling lad of yesterday took an eagle's flight and is today a celebrated professional, complete reporter, witty and incisive writer, ingenious editor; a man of lofty dreams.

Louis' life is full of lessons for those who aspire to grow and make an impact. He knew what he wanted and worked towards getting it. What he desired didn't come early enough, but he was not deterred. He kept hope alive. He kept doing, to the best of his ability, that which came his way. In school, he edited a campus publication and looked forward to a career in journalism.

After obtaining a diploma from a polytechnic in the early nineties, Louis was employed by the then Concord Press

Limited, publishers of the defunct *National Concord*. He sought to join the editorial section as a reporter, extremely confident of his writing skills and inquisitive nature, but he was posted to the office of the Managing Director as a junior secretary. The ever neat, ebullient secretary shunned truancy. He was never a lazy aide. He was reliable and trustworthy, but was not contented with the routine of office errands, keeping and carrying files and making tea for the boss. Instead of gossiping around the office when he was less busy, he managed his time well. He focused on the possibility of a brighter future, laying a good foundation for himself by contributing articles to the popular medium. The articles became regular, even though he was not an editorial staff.

Suddenly, the newspaper was hit by tragedy. The then military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, closed it down in the wake of the national upheaval over the annulment of the 1993 presidential election won by the late Chief MKO Abiola, the paper's founder. To sustain the pressure on Babangida and his collaborators to rescind their decision and allow the process to be completed, thus paving the way for Abiola to assume office as elected president, *Concord* transmuted to *Daily News*, the title of a newspaper owned by a former governor of Lagos State, Lateef Jakande, himself a journalist of no mean repute and backer of the campaign for the restoration of the June 12, 1993 presidential mandate. The political desk of *Concord* was drafted to produce the paper, as the annulment of the June 12 election and the campaign for its validation were the main news of the time. While Tunji Bello, then Group Political Editor of the *Concord*, was asked to oversee *Daily News* as editor, Sam Omatseye, *Concord's* deputy political editor was Bello's

deputy. I was assigned the political desk. We were at liberty to invite any editorial staff we were comfortable working with. It was in this new but transient occupational abode that Louis and I met.

His reputation preceded him. I had read him regularly on the opinion pages of the *Concord* but didn't know who he was. He walked up to me at our temporary office within an expansive complex in Oshodi, Lagos, owned by Abiola. The complex was said to have been earmarked for the bulk delivery of goods, including newspapers, on behalf of their respective owners, but the project never took off. Louis introduced himself and with excitement I welcomed him. Together with others, we reported for *Daily News* and wrote articles in the paper on why the annulment should not stand, thereby stoking the fire of the campaign for the revalidation of the election.

Louis proved himself a worthy colleague; a fine reporter even without formal training or experience. Unable to withstand the pressure, Babangida stepped aside and was succeeded by the late Chief Ernest Shonekan as Head of an Interim National Government. Shonekan was himself shoved aside by the late General Sani Abacha who re-opened the *Concord*.

Upon our return to *Concord*, Bello, who has a knack for excellence, approved the recommendation that Louis should be redeployed to the political desk. The move was stoutly resisted by some editors, who felt that the young lad, not being a graduate, should return to the MD's office as a clerical staff. Bello was fully convinced that there was life for the young man beyond the pushing of files and making of tea for the big boss. He had his way and Louis became a

political correspondent. That experience propelled him to return to school for further studies. In no time, he graduated with a honours' degree in English (Second Class Upper), and followed this with a Master's degree in the same discipline. He combined his tedious work at *Concord* with schooling with the support of his editors.

At *ThisDay* where he sojourned, first after the second closure of *Concord*, paradoxically, by Abacha who opened it after the exit of Babangida, and later when *Concord* finally went off the streets, Louis didn't disappoint. In his initial sojourn with the paper, we worked together on the politics desk. Having become friends, brothers and colleagues at *Concord*, we had a good rapport. We regularly had lunch together, closed together and rode, after the close of work, in the Peugeot 504 car allotted to me as editor of the politics pages by the paper's publisher, Mr. Nduka Obaigbena. Louis would alight at Agege, a high density neighbourhood in Lagos, while I continued towards Egbeda, then a far-flung new settlement in the state. Like the politics desk of *Concord*, the *ThisDay* desk was vibrant. With us was Eziuche Ubani, a fantastic newshound, who named Louis 'Unbreakable', a sobriquet he earned following a story he did on a South-west politician, now late, nicknamed 'Unbreakable' by his late father, a celebrated politician and first class thinker. Louis and Ubani turned out pungent analyses and reviews, applauded by all, including the *ThisDay* publisher.

When Louis announced that he was returning to *Concord* following the reprieve Abacha granted the newspapers that were closed, everyone was sad. He was resourceful, effective, and friendly. A man of strong will, he had made up his mind

and there was no going back. On his second coming, he was warmly received and given a higher position. In record time and by dint of hard work, he rose to become the paper's deputy editor. He kept an engaging column named BOTTOMLINE. A restless soul always seeking fresh challenges to overcome, Louis left the paper for *The Sun* and was made the pioneer editor of the Sunday publication. He quit *The Sun* to found *National Life*, a tabloid that rose to nationwide prominence instantly.

Fondly called 'Capacity' by his close friends, the bubbling journalist has the heart of a lion. This has reflected in his writings, the cuttings of which have become learning materials in Mass Communication departments in some tertiary institutions. In 2005, an undergraduate dissertation by a student of English at Abia State University, Onuoha Amarachi, focused on Louis' writings. Titled, "The Language of the Columnist in the Nigerian Print Media: A Study of Mike Awoyinfa and Louis Odion", it was written as part of the requirements for the award of a Bachelor's Degree.

A deep mind, he writes with courage, boldness and conviction. He speaks truth to power and challenges those in authority to a duel. He has used his columns and the papers he has edited and managed to protect and champion the cause of the downtrodden in society. Through his many engagements, he has shaped the course of events and proffered solutions to socio-economic and political problems.

Highly hilarious, Louis likes red wine and good food. He has a healthy appetite. He definitely has an excellent gait, and a huge physique to show for it. He earned the appellation 'Capacity'

on three fronts: as one who never jokes with his three-square meals, as a resourceful journalist with a huge brain, and as a reporter who can perform to maximum capacity.

In 2012, he took a break from journalism and veered into public service. As Commissioner for Information in the government of former Edo State Governor, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, he discharged his assignment with passion, took on entrenched interests and walked on paths dreaded and avoided by many. In his current assignment as Senior Technical Assistant on Media to President Muhammadu Buhari, the Nigerian Media Merit Award (NMMA) Columnist of the Year for 2007 and 2009, seems to be mastering the art of balancing varied interests. What an experience! Is he primed for a long stint in public service?

At 50, life goes on for the media celebrity and budding technocrat in politics.

Victor Ifijeh is Managing Director and Editor-In-Chief of The Nation newspapers.



With Professor Wole Soyinka in 2015 during his visit to him in Abeokuta.



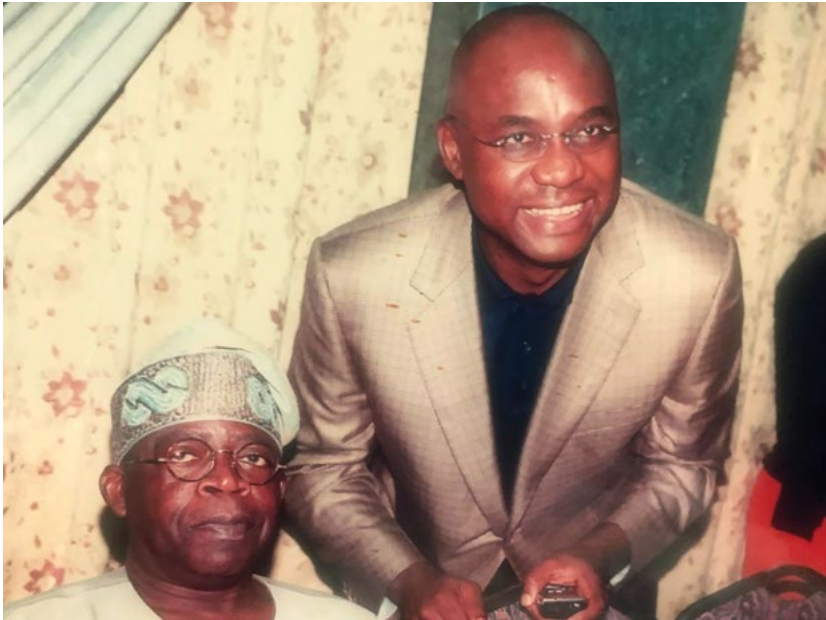
With John Momoh, Chairman of Channels TV.



With his wife and Prince Julius Adeluyi Adelusi.



With Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu on 26th February, 2023.



With the President-elect, Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu at a function.



With former Governor Adams Oshiomhole of Edo State.



With some dignitaries at Mama Olubi Osinbajo's (the mother of the Vice President) 90th birthday.



With Honourable Commissioner for Environment and Water Resources in Lagos State, Mr. Olatunji Bello at a function.



With Nigeria's High Commissioner to the UK, Mr. Sarafa Tunji Isola.



With Bello and Mr & Mrs Awoyinfa at Awoyinfa's 70th birthday.



With Deputy Governor of Lagos State, Dr. Hamzat Kadiri Obafemi and Mr. Olatunji Bello.



With Governor Babatunde Fashola and Mr. Muiz Banire during his installation as one of the Lagos State Ambassadors For Environment.



With Prince Julius Adelus-Adeluyi.



With the former Governor Ohakim.



With Governor Babatunde Fashola during his installation as one of the Lagos State Ambassadors For Environment.



With Mr. Pat Utomi during his installation as one of the Lagos State Ambassadors For Environment.



With Pastor Paul Adefarasin of House on the Rock.



With Alhaji Aliko Dangote at a function several years ago.



With The Mayeigun of Yoruba land, Chief Wasiu Ayinde during their installation as the Lagos State Ambassadors For Environment.



At a function in Benin City, 21 years ago.



With his siblings, Andrew and Eddy during a Christmas celebration at Benin City.



With his teacher, Chief Seinde Arogbofa, at the wedding of one of his siblings in Akure in 2007.



As an editor in ThisDay newspapers.



With his siblings (in green attire) during one of the festive periods at Ikare-Akoko, Ondo State.



At the christening of Anderson Odion in 2011.



With his uncle, Mr. Tony Ogie and younger brother at the wedding of his younger sister in 2004.



With his late sister, Mrs. Victoria Ayinde and Andrew Odion at the wedding of one of his siblings in 2013.



With his wife and children at home.



L-R: Mrs. Christiana Odion; Louis, Mum, Andrew, and Mrs. Seyi Odion.



With his son, Ese.



With daughter, Ewaen.

Sketches of a Big Brother



By Andrew Odion

Sometime in 1995, he sent a letter to our dad about my West African Examination Council (WAEC) result. I remember vividly what he wrote in one of the paragraphs: “Andrew’s English result may have been muddled up.... He’s good at the English language. But he didn’t make it. Surprisingly, he made good results in Mathematics, which we all thought he was poor at. So be patient with him and most likely I will be coming to relocate him to Lagos soon.”

That particular letter was the beginning of my journey to Lagos in 1996. After my arrival, he took me through a series of lessons in English language. Sometimes, he would give me books to review before sending the copy to the press for publication. These exercises sharpened my use of English. When the time that the result of my re-sit in English language was released, I passed well.

He has always been a pillar of support to me and everyone around him. He has his flaws and shortcomings, but his good heart and selflessness outweigh his shortcomings and flaws.

I remember when he was pursuing a degree programme in the University of Lagos (UNILAG); those were very difficult days indeed. I have kept wondering how we were able to weather that storm together. Whenever it was so difficult to comfort or reassure me, he would nevertheless say, “Things will get better someday, and we will enjoy.”

He kept such a punishing schedule then that I still can't understand how he managed to cope. On Sundays, he would relocate to the UNILAG campus and shuttle between the institution and his office at Concord Press in Mafoluku. By Friday night, he would however be back at home in Agege. All through this period, he ensured that everything I needed during the week, while he was away, was adequately provided for.

Even when I ventured into doing some menial jobs to support his efforts, he discouraged and tried to stop me from taking on these jobs. But whenever he noticed my mind was made up, he would allow me to be. Yet, one day an opportunity came that enabled him to “force” me to stop the jobs. He came back earlier from school, unannounced. I think it was a Thursday, instead of the usual Fridays. There were no mobile phones back then. He returned to meet me “worn out” and sleeping like a log of wood in the apartment that we lived in. Of course, I had been sleep-deprived for days before that moment.

What he saw made him so upset that he put his foot down immediately, insisting that I must stop casual work. I had carried on for weeks without his knowledge, managing before his return every Friday, to put on a bright face. But this time, he caught me off-guard.

“Capacity”, as he is fondly called, is a reflection of who he truly is. He got the sobriquet when he and some other colleagues went on an assignment outside Lagos. Anytime they visited a restaurant for lunch, he consumed more portions of food than others. When he was questioned about the reason(s) behind this, he told everyone in the room that he was expected to eat more than everyone else, because he was operating at “full capacity”.

He is smart and hard working. He has a die-hard spirit and never believes that anything is impossible to achieve. This has brought him to where he is today. Whenever he says, “I will do this or that”, I always wonder how he intends to achieve such set task, but before long thereafter, he usually shows me the results of his endeavour. This has also helped in shaping my attitude to life to a great extent, and to always be positive about things. His can-do spirit is worth emulating.

He gets angry easily. But his anger is like fireworks at Christmas; it doesn’t last. Once he calms down, he becomes his regular loving, caring self. I’ve studied and understood his kind of person, hence, except for a few occasions, we hardly have any prolonged “battles”.

He is a philanthropist whose generosity is sometimes beyond my comprehension. This did not just start. I remember that whenever I was leaving Lagos for school in Ado-Ekiti (Federal Polytechnic, Ado) back in the day, he would give instructions that I should take all the food items we had at home, to save me from the temptation of becoming what he described as, “alat’enu je” or a “miserable beggar.”

If I dared to ask him how he would cope, he often replied that, “I will always survive, but you may not be able to in the school environment”. He has been gracious and kind to me in ways I still cannot comprehend. And, this has also aided his continuous advancement.

He is a prolific writer. This talent, he discovered while in secondary school. It also inspired me in my days in both secondary and tertiary institutions. Upon my arrival in Ado-Ekiti, I stumbled on some of the articles he wrote as the Editor-In-Chief of the Ado-Ekiti Polytechnic’s press club. This was during a period when I was pondering on what extra-curricular activities I could engage in to keep busy beyond the school/class periods. I chose to tread his path and eventually became Editor-In-Chief of the Echo publications.

Living with him tempted me to venture into journalism. However, that changed in 2003 when I finally joined the banking sector.

On the occasion of your Golden Jubilee and on behalf of the entire Odion family from Odiguetue, Edo State, I wish you long life in good health and wealth! A very big thumbs up to you, our very own “Capacity”, a diligent member of “OPEC”!!

Andrew Odion is a Marketing/PR and Communications staff of Arik Air Limited. Before now, he worked at Standard Trust Bank (STB), which later transformed to United Bank for Africa (UBA). Andrew joined Arik Air as one of the pioneer staff of the airline, and has won productivity awards in both the banking and aviation industries.

Louis @ 50



By Sam Omatseye

One day, a certain fellow burst through the door with a tentative, if boyish, smile, twirling a sheet of paper. His greeting revealed a guttural gift, as he strolled into Tunji Bello's office. This was in the 1990s in Concord Press.

I was to later learn that the young man had more than a guttural gift. Added to that, he had a gift of guts and grit. The first thing I heard after that visit was a word of praise from Bello. If his smile was tentative, his competence illuminated.

He said the young man was working downstairs. He was not a journalist. He was Louis Odion and wrote this, showing me the write-up. He wanted it published and he had encouraged him to keep writing because he was a damn good – not his words – man of letters. I took a look at his script later, and I wondered if he had stridden through the walls of the university because he wrote better than many who had their master's degrees in literature. Bello said he had not. He was working as a stenographer.

Bello's idea – this gift would not waste. His plan – he had to find a route for him to journalism. He was a penman who must not be penned.

In his writing, I saw guts and grits, and one more quality: elegance, a muscular sort of beauty. You could almost hear his guttural voice leap out of his syntax. He was doing his job downstairs, but his joy figured in the words and figures of speech in the sheets of paper he transported upstairs.

We were in the political desk of the newspaper, and Bello was the political editor who wanted to get the new kid on the block with a blockbuster style into the swing of political writing, or any writing he wanted.

He did. From my recollection, June 12 and the adversity of the military ban on *Concord* newspapers opened the way for Bello to edit an interim newspaper, *The Daily News*, and Odion was an easy pick to work in the team. From then on, dream and chance met never to part.

After the ban, Bello had him join the journalism aspect of business. Since then, Louis has risen from the obscure role of a backwoods staff of a newspaper to a star player in the firmament of the profession, earning the name “Capacity” in humour and in deed. He has been Editor, columnist, Editor-in-Chief. Along the way, he has gulped a variety of accolades, including quite a few as columnist of the year from the Nigerian Media Merit Awards and for informed commentary from the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence. His writing has entertained many, ripped many a powerful man and woman, amused with its sometimes subversive humour. He has had tea and dinner with personages with the titles

of president, governor, diplomat and Nobel Laureate. His writing has shown a great sense of history, political insights and immersion in literary traditions.

Odion, knowing that he had to work himself through the university portal, decided to study and grab a degree in English at the University of Lagos. I recall in our days in *Sunday Concord* when we discussed subjects and shared books on some important themes in world and African literature.

But he is not just a good man in his profession, but in his relations. During my American sojourn, he became my editor as he accommodated my weekly columns when he shepherded the *Sunday Sun*. Of course, with the blessings of Mike Awoyinfa, the Editor-in-Chief. He also, for good humour, became my literary agent, as every money due to me in the newspaper for my work, he secured. I never took any of the money for myself, but he did me the duty of parcelling sums, with zest and integrity, to every loved one I wanted to have it. It is an honour I would not forget.

During that time, I had the joy of reading his every column, including a moving one about his gruelling visit to a dentist; a thing that made me wonder privately what damage it might have inflicted on his toothy smile.

Odion is a study in loyalty. He sticks with his friends, and he is a man who does not forget a good deed that comes his way. He has a serenity of vision on life, and looks at people from the viewpoint of cooperation.

He does not like soccer. His favourite sport is boxing. I recall, too, his love of Phil Collins. The pugilist and Collins, a punch in the eye and song for the heart. I saw the symmetry in Odion's

soul – the pugilist of the foe, the song for the friend. You saw him more with Collins in those days than any conversational foray into Alli or Fraser. But the boxer was always lurking beneath the surface.

Since our days in *Concord*, he has been a social centre of the OPEC group, with such stalwarts as Kayode Komolafe (alias KK) and, of course, Bello. I also remember when I visited Nigeria from the United States and he put a car at my service throughout my stay and afforded me many other acts of friendship I cannot ever repay.

His show of loyalty should never be taken for granted. He was on the side of Governor Adams Oshiomhole under whom he served as Information commissioner. I attended the swearing-in in Benin City, and at that moment, I could not but muse on how the trajectory of a man's life can take unexpected turns. What if he did not offer his articles and Bello was a stiff who would not look at a star but stanch him in the bud? In this life, we have seen too many talents who never had opportunity, who had energies but fell into the wrong projects, who had opportunity but not the reward, who had promise without promises, who had plums without a job. As the Bible says, the race is not for the swift.

But he had to leave that position because he was also his own man. He took it in his stride. Yet, he has outgrown the pain of that time and he is in good stead with the former governor.

His grit came into play for me when he escaped the hands of assassins in Benin, and how he confronted the kingpin of bloodhounds in the city. He made headlines puncturing the ego of a man who many feared. He did not fall hostage to any fear but held the man to account.

On a personal note, I have seen him break lances in my defence on a number of occasions, including my last encounter with a mass of unbridled political rabble, who took a misunderstanding of my writing as license and war cry.

Few who see him know little about his sense of humour. You only need to see him needle the great KK, or hang around Azu, or spar with Yomi Idowu. The thing about this is that Louis Odion is just turning 50, but all these men are over a decade older. Yet, he blends easily with them because his wisdom has outgrown the bones in his head.

As he takes a turn to his fifth decade, Odion still abounds with the sparkle and élan of the boy I first met in the 1990s, with all his optimism, brilliance and sap.

Congratulations.

Sam Omatseye is a writer, columnist, poet, novelist and playwright. He is also a co-host of the TVC Breakfast Show. He is the chairman of the editorial board of the The Nation newspaper. Omatseye has won quite a few awards around the world. He was the first winner of the Gordon N. Fisher Fellowship for Journalists in the Commonwealth, tenable in Canada at the University of Toronto. He also won the Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship in the United States. He won the African American Journalism prize for features writing for his article at the Rocky Mountain News. He has won columnists of the year for the Nigerian Media Merit Award multiple times, as well as the informed commentary prize of the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence four times. He is an honorary fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters and a recipient of the National Productivity Order of Merit.

Louis Odion: A Great Writer With Fire In His Pen



By Eric Osagie

Life begins at 40. If we go by that age-old conventional wisdom, Louis, the man who is just clocking 50, is 10 years old!

Of course, we know that would be an illogical fallacy to so conclude.

At 50, Louis has chalked up a bagful of achievements and medals that would take many others longer time to attain: an accomplished writer, notable columnist, editor, technocrat in government, among others.

Certainly, no mean feat for a kid who left his Odiguetue rural settlement in Edo State for Akure, Ondo State, then to Lagos, Nigeria's 'intimidating' commercial capital, where he found fame and fortune.

However, it wasn't just by a stroke of luck or flight of fancy to get to the apogee of his career, where he was to soon become a household name among the literati and his country's elite.

Louis put his neck to the ground stone. He knew success didn't come easy, so he was ready to make the necessary sacrifice. From a secretary to the group advert manager at the *Concord* newspaper, he became a prolific reporter contributing stories to all the titles in the newspaper stable; then he got transferred to the political desk of the same newspaper, where Mr. Tunji Bello, his 'guardian angel', became his boss and mentor. From then on, there was no stopping the young man in his meteoric rise to the top.

In quick leap, he became a Political Correspondent, Assistant Editor, and later Deputy Editor of *Sunday Concord*.

When the newspaper collapsed owing to the incarceration of Chief Moshood Abiola, the *Concord* publisher, Louis found his way to *ThisDay* newspapers, where he also had a distinguished career before editing the *Sunday Sun* and later serving as Editor-in-chief of the defunct *National Life*. It was from there that he was plucked by Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, then Governor of Edo State, to serve as Commissioner of Information, which he did for about four years, and now serves as media aide to Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo.

A bottom to top story indeed, one that typifies the Nigerian equivalent of the American dream. A rags-to-riches tale that often seems impossible, until it is achieved.

I first met Louis at the *Concord*. I was with the *Weekend Concord*, while he worked at the *National Concord*. I cannot now recall our first meeting, but as my younger Edo brother, it was only natural that our paths would cross in a 'foreign land'. Louis was always on hand to celebrate the success of

others. I remember when I was appointed Features Editor of the *National Concord* under Mr Dele Alake as Editor, Louis was one of the first persons to offer his felicitations. He was genuinely excited at my good fortune. He saw it not just as a personal elevation but an Edo triumph. I also recall when he was made Assistant Editor of *Sunday Concord*, he similarly 'stormed' my office to break the good news.

Louis has an infectious laughter and a friendly disposition, in spite of his sometimes 'stern look'. He works hard and plays hard. His comrades at 'OPEC' can testify to the latter.

An amateur boxer in his secondary school days, Louis approaches journalism and writing with the skills of Mohammed Ali and the aggression of Mike Tyson. He takes no prisoners in his political commentaries. He is a gifted writer with a pen often dripping fire, and oiled by the power of logic.

Being a voracious reader across disciplines, the breath of the vocabulary and poetic cadence lacing his writing are nonpareil and unmistakable.

At 50, the golden age, the age of maturity, Louis has definitely transformed from a boy to an accomplished man. However, being the restless person he is, it is 'morning yet on creation day' for Louis Odion. The best years are certainly ahead for him!

Eric Osagie, is the Chairman/CEO of THISNIGERIA , a print and digital newspaper in Lagos. He is the immediate past Managing Director/Editor-in-chief of The Sun newspaper.

Before then, he was MD/Editor-in-chief of New Telegraph, a sister publication of The Sun.

A Song of Memory for Louis Odion @ 50



By Christian Ita

Dear Louis,
I chose to make the tone of this communication personal because no other tone will capture the essence of your place in my life.

Your birthday has flung open the floodgates of memories and I am inspired through the long years of our friendship and brotherhood to whisper my gratitude for these in a silent song.

Of course, memories are evergreen when they are about persons or events that have taken up residency in our hearts. But when they are about you, my heart bursts at the seams.

You were a boss who became a friend, a brother and then a mentor; one whose name is eternally engraved in my heart in capital letters.

Since our paths crossed close to two decades ago, every year on your birthday, I get reminded of how much you mean to me. Pages of my life will be incomplete without many chapters detailing how you shaped it.

How did fate cause our paths to cross? I remember vividly that day in the *ThisDay* newsroom in Apapa. You had just arrived and were saddled with overseeing the Features Desk. Upon sighting me, you asked if I could contribute articles to the desk and I answered in the affirmative.

Little did I know that it would mark the beginning of a journey that would lead to the making of a better version of me. You went on from there to inspire me, lead me, fight for me, protect me, and then shape me for great things.

Such was the great leadership and mentorship you afforded me and many others who worked under you; leadership that was in consonance with John Quincy Adams' postulation that, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." I am grateful for this.

Of course, from afar, many saw you as difficult and unapproachable; but what they never knew was that, in reality, you are a kind man who is generous with his time, resources and personal contacts, and that you are humane and fiercely protective of your own.

You are a boss who values knowledge, competence, diligence and hard-work. You often go beyond the imaginable to give your subordinates access to your privileged network of friends, thus giving them opportunities to establish friendships in high places.

It was your belief in my competence that made you facilitate my nomination for appointment as Special Adviser to the then Information Minister, Frank Nweke Junior.

Similarly, when the job with the Cross River State government as Chief Press Secretary to Governor Liyel Imoke came, I had to choose between it and another job in a federal agency, which you had facilitated for me at the same time.

I remember with fondness that at the *National Life* newspaper, you rewarded competence, even when the intended beneficiary did not see such reward coming.

My succession to you as the Managing Editor of the newspaper exemplified this.

I recall that as you were gearing up to relocate to Benin City to resume duty as Edo State Commissioner for Information, we, the editors and reporters at *National Life*, felt a sense of immense emptiness and prayed that the next boss would possess a replica of your leadership qualities.

However, little did I know that in me, you had already seen your replacement!

I didn't see it coming. So, that fateful morning when you summoned me to your office upstairs on your last day at work and said to me, "Asiwaju said I should hand over the company to you," I instantly took ill.

I felt sick because I was overwhelmed with the thoughts of how I would fill the big shoes you were leaving behind. This was because *National Life* was not just a media organisation or a firm. It was a family where the interest and welfare of every staff was intertwined with the corporate objective.

You are one man who stands in the gap for your own. The Lion King that takes care of his pride.

I have seen this play out on so many occasions. I remember when we were still at *The Sun* newspaper, how you fought for us, shielding us from preying hawks, and drawing a metaphorical line in the sand that nobody dared cross to get at us.

A typical example that comes to mind of how you can take a bullet for an oppressed ally was when our typesetter and page planner, Mary, had a quarrel with Omakaro, the Crime Reporter. To teach her a lesson, Omokaro had brought a policeman to the office to arrest Mary.

Your unbelievable response did not just abort the arrest plot but the policeman was reduced to tears.

You were the oven that baked many reporters who had the fortune of working under you.

For a reporter to be in your good books, irrespective of years of experience, he or she had to be not just a good reporter but an excellent writer. Once anyone was competent, you would go to the ends of the earth for that person.

You were the University of life that all of us on the Sunday Desk of *The Sun* and *National Life* newspapers passed through.

We learnt a lot from you, both as professionals and young men and women who were evolving into responsible citizens in our own rights. You were inspiration personified.

Through you a lot of us came to realise that a journalist did not have to be poor. You taught us the art of leveraging on our network of contacts to escape poverty through the writing of books and the offering of other professional services.

Our memories are replete with images of you as our dashing young boss who drove nice cars and wore designer clothes, and whose perfume announced his presence from a mile away. Your carriage and panache gave us the hope that we could also lead comfortable lives as journalists if we worked hard at it.

For one who rose from ground zero, surmounting unspeakable obstacles, vicissitudes and vagaries of life, to the top, by dint of hard work, perseverance and a gritty resolve to succeed, your life story is a ladder anyone who desires to rise can borrow to climb to the rooftop.

What more can I say, boss?

At 50, may the kindness of your soul continue to shine through everything you do.

Happy birthday, brother.

Christian Ita is the Special Adviser, Media and Publicity to the Cross River State Governor.

“ Louis, my dear boy, you are gold at 50! My wife and I join your very many admirers, who have put these reflections together in celebrating you. Within the short time being recounted, you have scaled, like a stallion, life’s very difficult hurdles and earned gold in your chosen career as a man of letters and in your private life...”

– **Basorun Seinde Arobofa**

“ It is the hallmark of honour to celebrate such a wonderful and ever reliable brother, whose intellectual standing, hard work, brilliant writing skills, principled stand on national issues, progressive thinking, morals, upright pedigree and ever reliable conduct on issues have advanced the society.”

– **Tunji Bello**

“ Louis didn’t earn the sobriquet “Mr. Capacity” for picking up cottons. Highly cerebral and conscientious, he lifted himself by his own bootstraps all the way from private life to public office, where he has distinguished and acquitted himself with aplomb.”

– **Festus Keyamo (SAN)**

“ In the journey of life, each one of us knows those who we can count on to stand with us, while showing us in big and small ways that they are with us and for us, no matter the circumstance. I have learnt over almost three decades that having Louis on my side helps.”

– **Olusegun Adeniyi**

“ At 50, the golden age, the age of maturity, Louis has definitely transformed from a boy to an accomplished man. However, being the restless person he is, it is ‘morning yet on creation day’ for Louis Odion. The best years are certainly ahead for him!”

– **Eric Osagie**