

# NKY

# BOOK 16

# THE BOOK OF BRAVERY

*Dedicated to the LOVE called **William Gore**, special in every way*

His LOVE turned me to look  
I looked at a photo  
I looked at myself  
A look which was the start  
The start, a new journey  
A journey into the world  
The world, world of snakes  
LOVE TO YOU ALWAYS  
LOVE TO ALL ALWAYS

Reaction.

Yes, reaction.

I do not know when and how it all started.

I do not even know how to describe it.

I do not want to call it fear.

Because I am not sure it is fear.

It is definitely a reaction.

A movement creates a recoil. A sight makes me look away. Recoiling and looking away.

That was reaction.

That was the reaction.

That remains a reaction.

I like to tell this story. I have told it many times. It is my own tale. I tell it as I recall it. I recall it from memory. Memory is not always photographic. Sometimes the lapse in memory is what makes the tale photographic. But I have this memory which is photographic. It is the memory in my computer.

My laptop has become an extension of me. And I have become an extension of my laptop. So I call my laptop 'my best friend'. You will see it with me in the kitchen. You will see it with me in the living room. You will see it with me in bed. It is one of the first places I go to when I return home. So this tale is about my best friend. It is about my reaction to my best friend. My reaction on that day. That day when I returned home. Home to my best friend.

On the day which created this story, I went to my best friend as usual to connect as I always do, but what I saw made me throw my best friend as far away from me as my shock and reaction propelled. It was a reaction to an unexpected encounter.

Reaction.

What was it that made me throw my best friend away? What made me throw my own photographic memory away? A photograph.

I did not put that photograph in my laptop. "How then did that photo get into my computer? Did my throw break my laptop?" you may be wondering. I can assure you that nothing was broken by reason of my throwing my best friend away. Not even my best friend. Be rest assured. If something was broken, it may be my pace. I broke into a run. A run away from my best friend. A run away from my memory. A run away from the extension of me.

I must confide something in you. Yes, you, reading this now. You see, there is something about snake's movement which makes me recoil and look away. There is something about its shape and its tongue. Though, living in London, I rarely get a chance to see its shape or its tongue except in photographs. But with photos, I have a choice to look or not to look. If I do not look, I will not react. If I look, recoiling and looking away may be my reaction.

A photograph does not slither across your path and shock you as a snake may do in the wild. The photograph which made me throw away my laptop did not show the snake's tongue. So there was no reason to react to the tongue. The photo was not a snake's movement, so there was no reason to react to the slither of a snake. The only movement in the room was my own movement. I had only one look and then took flight.

So why that reaction? What caused the reaction? Was it the photo which made me throw away my best friend or was it something inside of me? If something inside of me, how long had that something been inside of me? Before birth? From birth? What is that something? What is its origin? What is the history? These questions take me down memory lanes as I search for answers.

Searching as far back as I can remember, I find myself in my teenage lane. In that lane I found a snake. But what snake was this? Was this snake inside of me or out there in the wild? You see beloved one, I have always had this sense of justice inside of me. So when people say they hate snake, you are likely to hear me say I LOVE snake. I will go against the flow and be the one who tells everybody that snake is my favourite being. I planted in everybody's mind the thought that snake is the pet I want to keep. Only yesterday, my sister Edy sent me an e-mail, asking me to confirm the tale that I kept a snake as a pet in Benin. She heard it from 3 sources. Three weeks ago, my sister Ngo said to me that she could not understand why from childhood, I said I liked snake and would like to keep one as a pet.

Given this entertaining aura of mystery which cloaks me, I now wonder whether it is wise to tell this tale. My favourite tale. My own tale. A tale which will demystify me. Who does that kind of thing? Magicians do not go revealing the secret which makes them larger than life. So why would I go revealing a tale which is better kept untold? Mysteries are sacred. Mysteries are beautiful. Why spoil it for everyone? If I continue telling this tale, my sister will come to learn that what was on display as the pet I had always wanted to keep was my sense of justice. If I allow this tale to flow, it will be widely known that the snake I kept in Benin was the snake of justice. My sister was looking to understand why I liked snake but my liking of a snake was my obsession with that sense of justice which has been residing inside of me from before my birth. So what my precious sister was looking to understand in the slithering and coiling of the royal python and could not understand, was in actual fact, the slithering and the coiling of the royal sense of justice. Justice for snake. Justice for all.

You see beloved one, many humans hate snake and will kill snake if they can. Some may even go that extra mile to make snake extinct if they have the power. They feel justified to hate and kill snake. For them it is the natural thing to do. As I walked down the memory lane in search of the reason why I threw away my laptop, I came upon a gathering of teenage girls having a discussion. I saw myself as I was, as one of the teenagers present at that gathering. Many of the teenage girls were declaring their allegiance to the popular hating of a snake and moving from the silent mode to the spoken hate. I was the only one left standing at the silent side. I had not yet spoken but I was reacting within. Reacting to every loathsome condemnation of a being who was not present at the gathering except in memory. I cannot remember whether any reason was being given by those declaring hatred but I absorbed the venom which they were spilling in words. The venom was causing reactions inside of me. And the reaction eventually erupted out of me to flow in words.

I had the power to contain my word-eruptions if I chose to stop it from flowing. I can always stop words from erupting from inside of me if I am determined to remain silent. To speak is a choice. To remain silent is a choice. The eruptions within me had reached speaking height and placed upon me the duty to speak them out. What came out of me to be heard was...

‘I LOVE snake’.

The words were propelled by thoughts such as: Why does everybody hate them and want to kill them? What have they done?

You see beloved one, those thoughts and words were going against the flow of the words of the majority. Those words immediately made me stand out and alone on one side. There was no snake there to support me. The snake did not know what was happening and would not have slithered into the discussion if given a choice. I spoke out of self-interest not snake-interest. I did not speak as a representative of the snake but as a representative of the reaction happening inside of me. A reaction snaking its way to be heard. A representative of my sense of justice. A representative of myself.

You see beloved one, I like going against the flow where the flow does not carry me along. At that particular moment, the flow did not carry me along. It repelled me and pushed me firmly into the inside of the snake and I became the snake. The outsider. The loner. The disliked. The hated. The unpopular. The shocker. The marginalised. The idea called snake was being maltreated with all the popular assertions of hate and dislike. At that particular moment, the snake was the most unpopular being at that gathering of teenage girls even though no snake was in sight. I chose to give a voice to the eruptions from within me. What I spoke was as popular or as unpopular as the snake was at that gathering. It caused a stir. It caused a recoil.

The phrase 'I LOVE snake', took on a life of its own. It appeared and became present. Present at the gathering. It took a seat. The reserved seat. The seat of the snake. It proceeded to carve me in the memories of many and caused many to have a rethink of who I was. It did not make them have a rethink of their views about the snake. At that particular moment, 'I LOVE snake' was the most unpopular utterance. It earned me a reputation in the minds of many. Reaction. Yes, reaction.

Snake is a very unpopular being in some regions of the world. In some other regions, they are worshipped. Those in whose minds snakes are beings to be killed, do not think there is anything wrong with their way of thinking. They are sure that they are justified in hating the snake. The fact that they are in the majority makes the assurance double sure. But who really cares about snake? After all, snake is only a slithering and coiling beast beneath the feet. How could anyone think otherwise?

Well, I thought otherwise, having absorbed all the hate declaration which penetrated deep inside of me to connect and switch on my sense of justice. I was moved to stand alone. I was standing up for myself not for the snake. What I said was not going to change the minds of those teenagers who hate snake. I was not speaking to please the snake but to please my sense. Flowing against the flow of the majority was not the most relaxing position but I was more of myself than I would have been if I had remained silent or followed the crowd. The fact that I cannot stop a crowd does not mean that I must follow the crowd to kill a snake. Taking the position of one who LOVES snakes, at least sets me free and apart. It made me stand out and I like to stand out. To be on the side of snake when everyone else was on the side of hate was an out I was pleased to stand. I was making a point. It was important to present a different point of view and I felt accomplished presenting the point of view of 'I LOVE snake'.

Did I really LOVE snake? Whether or not I did, I recall that I resolved to LOVE snake. I was determined to live what I spoke. So I decided to LOVE snake by saying 'I LOVE snake' as

often as is necessary. LOVING them, of course from a distance. Words are powerful so if one says something long enough it can happen. One thing that did happen following my declarations of LOVE for snake is that I became planted in the memories of many humans as that one who LOVES snake and who kept snake as a pet. In a way I did. I kept snake in mind and kept python sacred. It was exotic to be seen as the snake LOVER and I still LOVE the exotic. I have never killed a snake with my own hands and do not intend to kill them in the future. I see them as sacred as the curvy river and stream. I respect them all and LOVE them from a distance.

So returning to the photograph which made me throw my computer away, it is clear that the snake I found on the memory lane of my teenage years does not provide an answer to why I threw away my computer during the teenage years of my son. What my memory lane reveals is the interplay of 2 teenage instincts. First, is the instinct which can be called fear 'the looking away instinct' which some express as 'hate'. The second instinct is 'the sense of justice'. At any given time, most humans have those 2 instincts and use them according to their other interests. Many suffer from varying degrees of the condition known as ophidiophobia, snake phobia. I may be one of those many and those other teenage girls may also have varying degrees of the condition. During that discussion, the other teenagers allowed their sense of fear to speak out whilst their sense of justice remained in the silent mode. The reverse was the case with me. I allowed my sense of justice to flow to the surface. My sense of fear was switched to silence. Most, if not all, humans have a sense of justice which rise to act or fall to observe. The sense of justice of the other teenagers may have been engaged in other ways. They may have been roused to action by different emotions, encounters and experiences and occupy themselves saving lives of dogs, birds or humans, So whilst some may have treated the phrase 'I LOVE snake' as proof of my fascination with snake, it is in actual fact, proof of my fascination with justice and fairness.

I was then at St Catherine's secondary school Nkwerre, an all girls' boarding school in Nigeria, where in my first year, I was one of three girls going from one dormitory to another, performing on top of beds. As a comedian, I would wear an over-sized trousers once owned by my brother Ango. My 2 friends are both named Ngozi. They and I grew up at Enugu, that vibrant city where I danced on the streets on Christmas and boxing day, and where I was a child performer at both radio and television children programmes "Children's half hour" and "Tortoise club" presented by Auntie Ogugua, and Auntie Edna.

It was at St Catherine's Nkwerre that I encountered the longest and fattest earthworms I have ever seen in my entire life. I was so terrified by the experience that every night I had nightmares featuring earthworms. It came to a head when what seemed like hundreds (I could say thousands or millions but I am restraining myself from exaggerating) of earthworms coiled themselves tight, one on top of another like rubber bands in a horizontal coil around my shanks, protruding and towering outwards in layers on each leg from my knees to ankles. The earthworms made themselves look as though they were rings of shank-bands, the sort worn by the Rivers State's maidens coming straight from the fattening rooms where they had been kept for weeks being taught how to be good wives.

In my previous nightmares, the earthworms were on the ground and I had to tiptoe round them but they still made me jump out of my sleep to find myself awake in my school bed. But with millions of them coiled around my shanks, there was no way I could run away from them and looking away will not make them disappear. I certainly would not consider adopting the style of live-earthworm-shank-bands as a shank jewellery. The style will cramp

my style and will not fit in with my school uniform. It was not the style my teenage years were seeking to cultivate. It was simply a nightmare. The earthworms had certainly gone a bit too far this time. That is why it came to a head that very night. I took matters into my own hands by taking a lit candle. With the cool body of the candle in hand, and in a downward motion, I decidedly started scraping away all the earthworms from my shanks until every single one of them was removed. It was not easy to undertake that exercise which involved looking at my shanks to know where to scrape but that exercise worked because that night became the last time I had the earthworm nightmares.

The earthworms were able to penetrate my subconscious because they penetrated it whilst I was awake. You see, beloved one, every morning at about 5.30am, my school's morning bell will sound to wake up all boarders. Following the bell, many girls will reach for their buckets of precious water which they had fetched from far away Ngwu fountain. Ngwu was the local source of water which was miles away from my school. The journey to Ngwu was a dangerous one. It took at least 2 hours and could only be made in daylight. During rainy season water was more available and the journey less necessary. The journey was dangerous whether made during rainy season or during dry season because a slip off the dangerous cliff on route will certainly be a slip into death. Nevertheless, girls must bathe every day so at 5.30am the good girls would reach for their buckets of precious Ngwu water, pour a portion of it in a basin or smaller bucket and file out of their dormitories to stand naked on the grass fields outside each dormitory. I don't know why House 3 and House 8 come to mind at this moment. I don't remember the names of the dormitories but there may have been 8 or 9 dormitories and I remember that one had a glass door and glass windows. I remember that partly because I remember that and partly because I think the glass door and some windows were smashed when St Augustine's boys' secondary school invaded our school on mass to rape many girls, leaving blood trails and extensive damage.

Returning to the story of the naked girls on the grass, many obedient girls will place basins or buckets bearing their precious water on the grass outside of their houses in a state of undress. In Nkwerre, it was always dark at 5.30am so no one saw anyone's nakedness. The electricity-supplying generator did not come on until later so girls would use lanterns if light was needed from 5.30am until the generator was switched on. Seeing nakedness was not an issue at 5.30am. No one could see any nakedness in that morning darkness. No one was interested in seeing any nakedness that early in the morning and certainly not the naked earthworms under the grass upon which buckets of precious water were placed.

All girls except those who were unwell, were required to bathe at 5.30am. Many mornings, I may have classified myself as unwell because sleep can be an illness especially if you had spent all night in nightmares and needed to recover at 5.30am. Whenever possible, I failed to participate in the ritual of 5.30am bucket-bath on the grass. On such occasions, I could use the open bathroom in daylight. The open bathroom could accommodate up to 40 or more bathing girls at any one time but most times, you were more likely to find me in that communal bathroom, probably alone. I remember that there were times that I had been in the bathroom when others were in the classroom. At other times, others may be in the assembly singing their beautiful hearts out in one of those poetic hymns from the hymnal and ancient and modern book of common prayers. Of course such lateness was not permitted nor tolerated but the joy of a boarding school is knowing how to survive and knowing how to keep your uniqueness intact without getting into unnecessary tangle with the authorities. It was my sleep which always got me into many tangles. I have always LOVED my sleep despite earthworms appearing in some.

Thinking about it now, I may not be the only one who LOVED my sleep. The earthworms may have LOVED my sleep too. In actual fact, one or more may have been saved by my sleep though I did not make this connection until just this minute. You see, beloved one, the unfortunate thing about bathing on the grass is that the chemicals in the soaps which the young beautiful girls used to clean their beautiful skins were very harsh to the poor earthworms burrowing naked under the grass. Being disturbed, irritated and harassed by this early morning acidic treatment, the earthworms will wriggle out of their sleep to move from under the grass onto the path, and there my path and their paths would cross as I walk from my dormitory to the chapel or classrooms. In the early morning sunlight, the path from my dormitory to the classrooms will be seen covered by trails of what seemed to me at the time as 100s of the longest and fattest earthworms possible, blocking my way and making me tiptoe in order not to step on them as they lay dying from both the sun and the chemicals.

Nkwerre had very fertile soil and their bananas were the longest and fattest I ever saw and so was their cassava. I LOVED fertile soil and all the beautiful diverse green leaves they produced but I could not step on the earthworms on the path. I had to tiptoe through the path to get to class. All but a few patches of the path would have been covered by earthworms. I had learnt to avoid stepping on grass but where possible I stepped on grass to avoid stepping on the earthworms on the path. So my manoeuvre through the path had to be tiptoeing speed on whatever patch of ochre-coloured ground left uncovered by dying earthworm. You can see how my morning encounters of each day turned into my nightmare of each night. You now know how the earthworms entered my subconscious. Not their fault. They were perfectly happy where they were until the soap chemicals dislodged them unto the path where they will eventually be scorched to death by the afternoon sun.

I had other recurring dreams. I still remember the one with a woman with piles of different sized human bottoms appended to her own bottom. She was a kind of figure you can never forget. She was in the business of going about cutting off and collecting people's bottoms and appending them to her own bottom, making her bottom segments of bottoms which stretch feet away and curve up in the shape of a bird's tail. I don't know why I associate that figure with the title 'Calabar woman' whenever she appeared in my dream but there was a local song which goes like this: "ike nwanyi calabar meghe mechie" meaning "bottom (ike) woman (nwanyi) calabar (calabar) open (meghe) close (mechie)". This song was going around when I was a young girl growing up at 16 Grants street Uwani Enugu. Songs and words inspire imaginations and may have planted this title in my dream.

Calabar is a town in Nigeria miles away from Enugu. I grew up at Enugu, a cosmopolitan town admitting of diversity. In my teenage years, I was not as tall as others and was slim and tiny but I prayed to be the tallest girl in the school and wanted to be curvy with bigger bottom like others. This may explain my dream. On the other hand, the association may have come from a woman I once saw in my neighbourhood at Enugu. She had such a big bottom. The shape and size of her bottom left an impression and made me wonder for a very long time, how it is possible to get to that shape and size. The impression may have translated itself into the subject of my dream. Probably Calabar entered my mind because of myths associated with Calabar. A distant place. Witchcraft is always associated with the unknown. Children are overly imaginative and impressions left by songs and words can assume gigantic proportions in a child. The bottom-collecting woman was very psychedelic, carrying a lady's fashionable hand bag in her left arm with bent elbow as psychedelic ladies do.

This recurring image played its part in my dream but it came a time when I dealt with this dream too. I do not remember how but I may have destroyed the woman or outran her when she attempted to harm me. I know for sure that I defeated her someone and that the recurring dream stopped. I don't know why I am remembering the dream with the 3 bluish Igbo pear which I fought to keep locked in my locker when they were fighting and forcing themselves out of my school locker. I again won that battle which was one of a series of battles leading to the presentation to me a silver cross in the last dream. I think the series of 3 dreams happened when I was very religious and fasting 6am to 6pm for 40 days. My recollection of this is not very good but so be it.

My longest recurring dream is the dream that started when I was a child and continued intermittently into my adulthood. This particular dream was continuous over days. I would continue the dream the next night, from the point where I stopped the night before. Present in that recurring dream was a greyish bridge above a sea or a river or a stream. Something like Pont Julien on a very dry August.

Rocks and a coiled python. No water under the bridge. I was always afraid of walking over a bridge. I would always wonder about what would happen to me if the bridge broke. I remain afraid of falling into a river. You see beloved one, I am not a swimmer, so I have a good reason to fear falling into a river. This is more so given that I almost drowned on 2 different occasions when I was under the age of 7. Then came the most recent drowning episode which happened in a swimming pool in Fulham, London with my 6 year old child watching. I was drowning and smiling until pulled out. My mother has this beautiful saying which comes to mind at this stage. My mother describes some laughter as 'ochi onye mmiri na eri' - the smile or laughter of a drowning person. Mmiri is water in Igbo language.

So beloved one, you can understand why a bridge brings on its own wandering and wondering spirit. The bridge was fascinatingly long. Beautiful with well-designed sides. I remember the beauty of the rock below and the peaceful python coiled as motionless as the rock. They were things of beauty which did not kindle any fear in me. So if I remember the python in my dream as peaceful and monumental as the beautiful rock under the bridge, when did my fear of snake start, if I should use fear to describe that reaction of throwing away my laptop, screaming and fleeing? If as a teenager, I took steps to LOVE snake, when did the fear of a photograph slither into me?

The reaction. The photo. The throwing away. The flight. Going down memory lane again, I remember that the first photograph of snake I may have seen may have been the image of a black-haired beautiful female holding python. A well-known image in Nigeria. Popularly known as the image of Mamy iwota. Water goddess or water spirit. Mama water. The mother which lives in water.

The python carried by the Mamy iwota did not frighten me. I LOVED it. I admired the entirety of the photograph to no end. I was fascinated by the exotic beauty of the black-haired female in the photograph. That image to me was an epitome of beauty. The photograph was in my cousin's shrine. I call my cousin what others called her. Nwanyi agwu. I have never thought of the meaning of her name. But now, I stop to think. It may mean 'female does not finish/end/, female is not exhausted or female is finished/ended or female is exhausted'. It may also mean 'female spirit'. Nwanyi means female or woman. The meaning of agwu depends on the way it is said. Many would say that the name means a woman possessed by spirit.

I always enjoy visiting my cousin's shrine whenever I visit Uga. Uga is my village though my husband, Charlie, says it is too big to fit into the definition of a village. So my husband says Uga is a town. But town does not sound as sweet and as exotic as village. I LOVE the sound of village and prefer the imagery it evokes my imagination.

I do not know how I am related to my cousin but she is not a first or a second cousin. My cousin's shrine is a sacred place. It has several mirrors. I LOVE mirrors. It has a bowl of water. I LOVE water. Coins are found in the water. I admire coins. In my cousin's shrine, the beautiful image of Mamy iwota occupies a central place. My cousin Nwanyi anwu is one of the gentlest humans I have ever met. So soft-spoken. So kind. Beautiful and slim with faded or faint body decorations dyed on her skin.

She LOVES me. That I know for sure because she always beamed and glowed with smile and exclamation whenever she saw me. Her beautiful gentle soft but quiet voice would ring out in greeting. She is of my parents' generation but like all of us, she is an ageless being. She is now a Christian and there is no longer any image of Mamy iwota anywhere near her. Before she became a Christian, we would visit her and she would take us into her sacred shrine. Her shrine was always clean and peaceful. She used to tell the future and could also tell the spirit which had been re-incarnated in a new born baby.

I LOVE my cousin. I LOVED being in her shrine. It was one of the highlights of visiting my village. I derived so much joy from being in that small rectangular narrow room which my cousin set apart as a shrine. White and red are the colours my mind recalls seeing around her. She had strong affiliation with water including the waters of my village. She had been heard in the middle of the night chanting as she ran to the far away river possessed by the spirits which controlled the actions of her body at that particular time. Alone she will race to the river, knowing no fear. I was fascinated by these kinds of stories. I LOVE stories and myths from all over the world. I was drawn to the beauty of my cousin's shrine. The photograph of the python and the Mamy iwota was an epitome of beauty, not a thing to fear.

So why did I run away from that photograph on my laptop if the image on my cousin's wall was an epitome of beauty? How did the photograph get into my laptop? Well, it got there because a facebook friend tagged me on that photograph. I ran away because I was not expecting to see 2 entwined long greyish brown snakes. The photo did not stir in me the same joy stirred in me by the photograph in my cousin's shrine. What the photograph did was to lock me out of my laptop, out of the extension of myself, out of my best friend. Not only did I throw my laptop to the farthest part of the bed as I could manage in shock, the presence of that image on my screen meant that I had to run away from my room. I shut the door so that I will not see the image on the screen through an open door.

I was so disabled by that image. Disabled to the extent that I could not approach my best friend, the laptop. Un-tagging myself from the photograph involved looking at the screen. I could not look at the screen so could not un-tag myself so as to remove the photograph from my screen and from my facebook profile page. I was labouring under a serious disability which stopped me from continuing to do all the work I needed to use my laptop to do. But how did it all start? This turning away?

I have always been fascinated by the story of the royal python, a being treated as sacred by my people of Uga. I remember writing a play as a Theatre Arts undergraduate which had in it

the story of how a python was the guiding spirit of a baby whom the python always protected from other beings which went to harm the child when the parents were away in the market. The story involved the manifestation of the spirit world on the human plane. The fight happening in the spirit world was manifested in the human world. The harvesting of a wonder yam shaped like a human was part of the highlights of the play.

I lived in the city, Enugu and did not encounter a snake's bite when I was growing up. Going down the memory lane, I remember thinking that a snake's 'spit' touched me when I was on a walk with my family on a narrow path in Bonnieux, France. Some touring Americans had earlier told us that they saw a deadly snake in the neighbourhood of Pont Julien, a beautiful bridge over Calavon River which dries up under the scorching August sun. I had never seen a snake in Bonnieux but the tourists' tale of seeing a deadly snake was enough to plant the fear of a snake's venom in my psyche. The fear in my mind converted any passing fluid in the air into a snake's venom. Minds are designed to be imaginative and do conjure all sorts of fears. Minds create and enlarge. Instincts warn to protect. To protect us from possible harm. But following instincts can also be disabling. It is good to take the warning, use it to keep safe but not to be prisoners of the fear in our minds.

You may have heard that women will crush a snake's head and a snake will bruise women's heels. Perhaps, I have never been a woman because I could never kill a snake whether with my hand or with my heel. To be able to kill a snake, I have to be able to look at it. If a photograph was making me run away how would I look at a snake to be able to kill it? No snake has ever bruised my heel. I have encountered a black snake and a green snake in the wild. Whilst studying at a room called 'box room' in St Catherine's Nkwerre, with the dim light of my lantern after lights out, I reached out to pull a belt hanging overhead on a clothes-hanging string but the belt moved. It was then I realised that it was a snake and not a belt. It slithered away fast and disappeared.

Reaction.

I remember seeing a green snake high up on a palm tree in my village. I started calling out to my Uncle Justin and pointed to the unreachable snake at the highest part of the palm tree. In his dignified manner, my uncle smiled and said: "what do you want me to do? Do you want me to climb up the palm tree?"

My uncle did not climb up to the snake. I remember the green snake appeared free and exhibiting its beautiful green skin at the top of the palm.

Reaction.

The one snake which did not go free was a snake which got on the wrong side of my husband. It was a tiny snake but encountering it unexpectedly did make me jump. The snake was eventually killed but I did not kill that snake. It was my husband who killed the snake. He killed the snake because he did not want a snake to evict him from our home. Yes beloved one, I saw a snake in our home one evening when I got home from work. I saw it slithering from the grass lawn outside our home. I was shocked, fled from the spot where I saw it and waited outside our home until my husband got home.

We were living in Benin at the time. My husband prior to killing the snake would say that he was a Buddhist. Buddhists as I understand do not kill anything but my husband did not hesitate in killing the snake. Acting not as a Buddhist but as a home owner who found his wife waiting outside the home for fear of sharing a room with a snake, my husband searched our whole home, turning over my piles of clothing which were on the floor, looking under the bed and on top of the bed, searching the kitchen and the bathroom until he found the tiny snake. At that very time, his state of mind justified his out of character action of killing a living being. I had already allowed my fear of snake to lock me out and keep me out from the time I returned home until the time my husband returned home. It was already night time when my husband returned from work. I suggested that we should sleep away from our home that night with the hope that the snake would be gone by the next day. My husband stated that he will not be evicted from his own home by a snake.

Reaction.

The snake which took over my best friend laptop and evicted me from my room was not killed by my husband. It was removed by my niece and first God-child, Nyny. She herself did not want to look at the snake but her LOVE for her Aunty made her brave and gave her the strength to rescue my best friend laptop by un-tagging me from the photograph. Such is the privilege of having a family. Then my son heard the story when he got home. His reaction at first was laughter, then he expressed disbelief, followed by *“how ridiculous to allow a photo lock you out of your own computer. If it is an actual snake, I will understand but a photo of a snake? What if Nyny was not at home?”* At the time, he was a teenager of about 14-15 years old. He did not drop the subject despite being probably asked to drop it. He will not let the matter rest despite being probably asked to let it rest. He took the same laptop, found several snakes and insisted that I look at them. Of course I was at the other end of our home and will not come anywhere close to where he wanted me to be. He talked and smiled and laughed and stood with me and walked with me and guided me like a guide dog does its companion until I took my first look. Then he continued to encourage me until I could walk independently of him. From walking independently of him, I can now read about snakes and look at photographs of snakes. But I still cannot answer the question: how did my fear of snake start? There are many things that defy answers. My reaction to snake is one of them. One thing I know for sure is that I am not one of those humans programmed to crush a snake's head. I am one of those programmed to LOVE snake but end up jumping in shock or looking away. Instincts. Reaction.

The book of bravery is a case study on myself. The book about my journey back into myself to query some of my own principles and practices, to locate the point from where my prejudices emanate, to confront myself and to allow LOVE to change my prejudices. I am still learning to look at snake but my reaction to snake is not as disabling as it once was. I have made snake a subject of study and continue to study snake, their behaviour and their myths from diverse cultures of the world. I seek to understand what I did not know including my reactions. I wanted to understand. I wanted to change. I am gradually changing. That is why you find snake slithering on the pages of this book. Not their photographs but the lessons they have taught me. Snake has been teaching me many things about myself, about fear, about close-mindedness, about the earth, about justice, about bravery. The bravery called self-change. Reaction. Yes, reaction.

LOVE TO YOU ALWAYS  
LOVE TO ALL ALWAYS

## POSTSCRIPT

***AND THAT LOVE CALLED WILLIAM GORE PENNED ME THESE WORDS ON 2<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER 2017***

Thank you so much for coming mum!  
And making the radio show so unique  
You brought your energy and it worked:?  
Eating your pasta now, it's so delicious

One thing I meant to say  
A long while ago  
Actually when one day I just messaged you saying I love you  
Is that I am really really happy and proud of you  
And all you have been achieving  
Your health, your branching out with your work, the growth of Touch LOVE  
It's really inspiring  
And such an expansion that I often forget to take note of it  
It's only because I was looking at all fb pictures from when Ijeoma was here  
And I looked at us and just thought how far we've come  
And particularly how far you've come as a driving force in mine and your own life  
So I am very grateful and also very very proud  
That I have such an amazing mother

***That is from a son whose LOVE is a driving force to me and others whose kind invitation to his radio programme inspired me to write my first hip hop...***

You have in this show, a person of South  
Who has a hip but no hip hop  
The hip hop speak, a strange language  
She's here to learn, to gain hip hop  
Kokakokakakokakoka hahaha

You have in this show, a person of South  
Who has no hip but has hip hop  
The hip hop speak, a great language  
She's here to unlearn to gain a hip  
Kokakokakakokakoka hahaha

You have in this show, a person of South  
Who has a hip but no hip hop  
The hip hop speak, a strange language  
She's here to learn, the way it's done