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A Lifestyle...Expanding Possibilities

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Tope Olagbegi

The Lover, The Strategist, The Teacher

From the Desk of Editorial/Lifestyle Director



I first met and interviewed Tope Olagbegi about seven years ago. She was my second cover interview for 'Glitz,' a style pull out of the now defunct newspaper, 'The Union,' where I was first the pioneer Style Editor and later the Assistant Editor of The Union on Sunday.

Before that interview, I had only heard about Sixth Sense Interiors, her interior outfit and knew it to be one of the biggest interior decoration outfits in Lagos and beyond. The signature orange colour and butterfly symbol stands out in such a way that it is easily etched in one's memory for easy recall.

Suffice to say, after the interview and a photo session with her, I could better understand why she was one of the most sought after in her line of busi

ness. Tope is as passionate as they come. Dedication, thoroughness, finesse, and an eye for

details and most importantly, the God factor, are just a tip of what embodies her work and life ethics.

Seven years after, Tope has not only retained those attributes, I could see a different kind of fire burning in her; the fire to take territories as well as her increased passion for God. In taking territories, this she has already began to do with the various ventures she has been involved in besides Sixth Sense Interiors; speaking engagements, life coaching, jewelry business etc.

And what more, embedded in this piece are quite a number of invaluable life lessons to learn from.

So settle down comfortably, read and digest what I consider an incisive and deep interview.

Enjoy!

Mkarenji Ukonu

Tope Olagbegi

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You have been around for so long many are surprised that you just clocked 40. How does it feel to reach this milestone?

I was a little apprehensive I must say. Two years ago, I felt I wasn't where I wanted to be. I had a panic attack the night of my 39th birthday. It was my first time experiencing it as I only hear about people having panic attacks. I had gone to dinner with my husband who at 10pm, became really excited for me turning 39 and I began to sweat, my heart began to beat really fast. I felt ill and then I realized I was panicking because I had heard that a fool at 40 is a fool forever. So many connotations have been attached to that saying and looking at my life, I felt I wasn't where I wanted to be on my last lap to being 40. However, at 15 minutes to midnight, I began to pray. Even though I wasn't at peace, I felt the strength to run the last lap of my 30s with vigour. I had no choice but to accept where I was.

You haven't done badly in life, if I may say so. Was there more to wanting to be at a certain place in your life at that point in time?

From the time I was 25 up until the time I locked 36, many things happened in my life, things I never imagined would happen to me, happened.

Amazing things actually. But from the moment I was 37, things began to confuse me; I was no longer running at the same pace I was



running for the last 10/11 years, hence the panic attack. But having received that strength at prayers, I simply decided to make peace with where I was. So

today at 40, I am excited and even though it's a cliché, I now get it that with women, life actually begins at 40. From my interactions with women, I gather that something happens when one is 40, you come into

your own. I used to think that I had come into my own, but now, I really understand it. I think the most amazing part is that I feel so beautiful,



inside and outside. I feel energized. I feel really comfortable with where I am. I also feel that I have also come to understand in the past few years, a switch needed to happen, that I needed to change focus. And if those things that happened didn't, I wouldn't be where I am at 40.

What would you say life has taught you ever since you decided to embrace your place in life?

An enormous lot. Life has taught me that things happen; that life will stone you with all manners of junk but that time can erase all that junk. I have learnt that it pays to be focused. Distractions will come, anticipate them. Life has taught me to appreciate my family and loved ones. I have learnt to never take the love of anyone for granted. Life has all also taught me that love comes from unexpected vessels. I have also been taught that whatever it is that you want to do, just go ahead and do it because you never know where it will take you. I have also learnt that even with pain, there is beauty and to expect it to be God who will turn that pain into pleasure. I have also learnt firsthand that our wisdom is foolishness in the sight of God, that things we cherish so much could end up becoming a curse and those things we look down on can become a blessing. I have also learnt that if you look hard enough, in the ugliest thing is so much beauty while in the most beautiful thing, there is ugliness. I have learnt that spirituality is magic, for the lack of a better word, how that we pray about something and it magically just happens in our favour.

What are your expectations in terms of work, family, self, generally the next chapter of your life?

Having come into my own at 40, I have always believed that when you are on your lane, things will work. I see life as a two-lane road with no demarcations; the left lane for the fast cars and the right lane for extremely slow cars. If you are designed to be a fast car on the slow lane, you will always meet road blocks. And if you are a slow car and find yourself on the fast lane, you will have people screaming at you

for being too slow and overtaking you. That illustration is how I see my next chapter. I know what lane I am meant to be on and when I am on the right lane, it isn't because I won't have opposition or challenges, but everything ends up working for my greater good. So now, I know the things that I can do, I know the things that grace can permit me to do, I know my own proclivities, I am very clear about that. I may not know everything, but I know that I am where God has designed me to be. I know that much. And he has spoken it to me and assured me of it. Clocking 40 has been totally different; I have never been so excited to be 40 because I see exponential growth, platforms, opportunities, capacities etc.

Speaking of platforms and opportunities what prompted your write up about your life experiences on social media?

That was inspirational. On January 1st this year, my husband gave me a card and a gift and I was shocked to see it was a 40th birthday card. He said he would give me a card and a gift each day until my birthday, 40 days to that day precisely. I decided to have a memoir to chronicle my last 40 days until my 40th and compress my life experiences in it.

Are you going to get it published and add author to your resume?

Eventually, yes. But I have been working on marriage books for a while. It had to take a back seat as the memoir superseded it.

Why marriage books?

I am in love and I see everyday, how fewer people are finding love and those who manage to find it are unable to sustain it. I don't doubt that some people have found the love of their life but it is one thing to find it and another to nurture and grow it. Marriage as an institution has experienced a lot of negativity so I felt, how can I - having found love, having gone through turbulent waters in love, having reached shore, having groomed it - how can I help other people? So this prompted me to begin to write about marriage. I have been speaking to married

women for about ten years. I have a women's ministry called Orange Butterfly. It is five years old and I speak mostly about love, marriage. I have realized that it isn't just in speaking, people want to see an example of what you are telling them. So I talk about the sweet side of love, the struggles and how I was able to surmount those struggles. You will be amazed how very similar a lot of our stories are. So I really want to help those who aren't married yet, not to make the disastrous mistake of marrying one who does not have the potential to be a life partner in every sense of the word.

Would you honestly say you have reached your own shore in marriage and love and that you are qualified enough to speak on that subject?

Yes. I say this because last year when I began to write about marriage on Instagram, it was my husband that first pointed it out to me, that we were getting spiritually attacked. I mean, I write a story and two days later, my husband and I would begin to quarrel. We are friends and so we 'fight' and bicker at each other every five minutes. We haven't quarreled in five years but those quarrels became more frequent. At a point I felt I wasn't true to myself and wondered why I should be writing about marriage when my husband and I couldn't keep it together. My husband made me realise that there is something spiritual about writing and liberating people. And this I why I say I have reached my shore in love and marriage. Even though I have been married for 19 years, I have had to ask myself if I have



experienced enough about marriage to write about it. And my thoughts have taken me to places most people won't want their marriages to be tested. And I can confidently say I have reached a place of peace because if this is what I am called to do, then my husband and I have a lot of work to do. I mean if we are getting attacked just reaching only about 5000 people, I wonder at what would happen if I was reaching a larger audience. So before I put anything out, I do what is re-

quired of me as a Christian, that is being able to have a say in the things that I want to see manifest both spiritually and physically.

Marriage is a two-way thing, it doesn't rest solely on the woman. How do you incorporate the male folk into your 'ministry'?

Well, a lot of my male followers on social media have reached out to me making me realize that I couldn't be partial. However, if you look through what I call

the fulcrum, that is, the word of God, there are too many explicit instructions about women regarding marriage. I never saw it that way but the more I read the word of God, the more I realize that with the Proverbs 31 woman, the only reference to the man was when he stood at the gate on account of her. That is not to say that men don't have a say in this equation. But the bible did say that, 'A wise woman builds her home and the foolish one destroys it.' This has always been the



standpoint of so many things that I believe in. It has always helped me each time I am faced with a dilemma where I would ask myself if I am acting in wisdom or as a result of foolishness. The onus of the success of my marriage, I needed to get to a point where I took responsibility for it. That mindset has helped me in equipping the ones not yet married for what lies ahead. I think it is very important that the woman is clear on who she is making these sacrifices for. Who am I building this with, is

something she should ask herself. However, despite the fact that men were flawed from inception - and I have so many examples to buttress it from scriptures - sooner than later, men will have to up their game. Because the more women have their taste buds refined, the more men will have

no choice but to up their own game. But the mere fact that women have been equipped with the capacity to fix their homes and raise generations is one of several reasons why I am focused on helping women take charge of themselves and ultimately, their home.

You are well known for presence in the interior business, now you have added jewelry to



it. I know there would be a reason behind this as you don't do things without reason.

Rehabiah Gold has gone through metamorphosis over the years being a subsidiary of Designs by Rehabiah. Truth be told, I actually started the jewelry business in 2002 before venturing into interior design. It was a profitable venture at the time however, my other interests were yearned more for me and for that reason I

kept it in the cooler. Four years ago, I made some bad investments and poor business decisions that got me owing a financial institution a huge sum of money. It became increasingly difficult to pay back. Over the years, however, I had casually amassed a sizeable quantity of jewelry. With no intention to ever pawn my jewelry, I

had purchased exquisite pieces in gold, precious stones including diamonds. But Alas! Little did I know that there was going to be a role this fetish of mine was going to play. I sold the pieces upon the suggestion of a friend of mine and it was the solution to my bank debt. It was humiliating though watching my jewelry weighed and calculated against my debt. After a grueling four hours, the nightmare was over. The jewelry successful-



ly offset my debt. But that was not to be the end of the story. I didn't have jewelry to wear. I was sad dressing up every morning. And then, I started dreaming of myself shopping for jewelry. However, it was with a difference. I was shopping alright but not for myself in those dreams. It looked like I was shopping for others. The dreams were too recurring not to have meaning. It was clear there was something here as the dreams didn't stop coming. I suddenly got it. I was to restart my jewelry biz. However, it wasn't what I really wanted. I had done it in the past and moved onto other things. The dreams continued. It had to be a sign from God that there was something here for me and I took heed. I started visiting the local markets but realized that the pieces were either common or overpriced. I wasn't deterred. I was determined to make it work. And it did work. Eventually, the tragedy of debt produced a fledgling business that has empowered

hundreds of women world over. The retail of pieces purchased wholesale from the Rehabiah Gold Jewellery Network given hope to many again. My crisis ended up helping others in crisis out.

Running several successful businesses and organizations is no mean feat. How are you able to keep up?

Now because I run so many businesses, one of the things I have now learnt is managing businesses more strategically. I don't want to be the technician or the administrator of any of my businesses. I want to set up businesses such that I can oversee them, do the things that I know how to do best but not working it. With jewelry, the only way I could think of doing it strategically, was to have stockists, that is have other people sell it. I mean, if I appeal to say a thousand people in my network to sell, I will automatically be reaching their own one thousand people mul-

tiplied in one thousand places. It has a rippling effect. Believe it or not, we have stockists in China, Singapore, Finland, South Africa etc. With Sixth Sense Interiors, it has taken a new dimension as well as I am not in the fore front of it. I am also a life coach as well and I do one on one coaching sessions. However, that has taken a back seat for now as I am re-strategizing. I have clients who are waiting for directions for my coaching sessions. So its all about working smart but productively.

What would you say has been your greatest challenge in life so far?

Coming to terms with what I was called to do. I built a brand that was bigger than me and to think that I was called to something bigger was unimaginable. And so accepting that was a struggle.



And your greatest achievement in life at 40?

Without sounding cliché, my children.

Where do you see yourself 40 years from now?

On a yacht, without a care in the world but most importantly, having people reading my materials in whatever form that is relevant to that generation, to help make their lives better. But in the course of the next 40 years, I want to see myself called to service the engine room of the nation. I aspire to be one of the called to proffer solutions to world issues. And I kid you not.