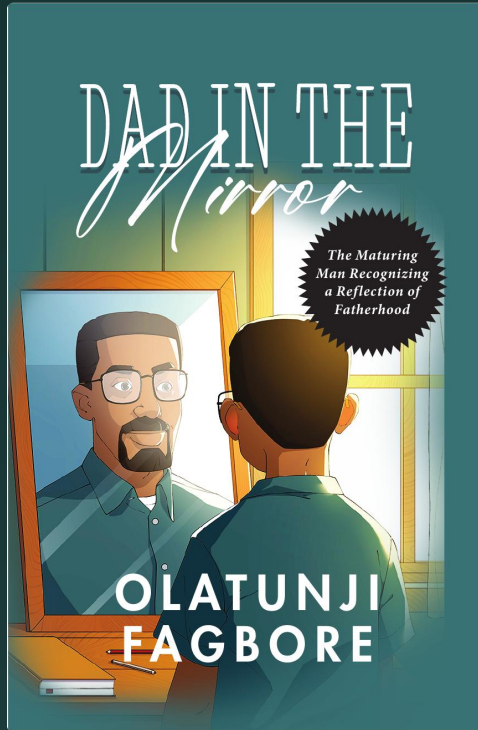


FREE CHAPTER PREVIEW



Chapter One: The Struggle

From *Dad in the Mirror* by Olatunji Fagbore — the true story of a father and son who almost ran out of time to say what mattered.

A GIFT TO YOU, FROM THE AUTHOR

Chapter One

THE STRUGGLE

“My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, ‘You’re tearing up the grass.’ ‘We’re not raising grass,’ Dad would reply. ‘We’re raising boys.’”

— Harmon Killebrew

My father, Victor, a towering figure in my childhood memories, remains vivid and sharp in my mind. His stern demeanour often struck fear into my young heart, particularly when I broke something around the house. With just one look, he could convey a thousand warnings without uttering a single word. He was the ultimate authority in our household, reviewing our report cards with a critical eye and comparing us to classmates who “didn’t have two heads,” implying that we had the potential to do even better.

Despite spending countless hours by his side as a child, I never truly understood my father on a deeper level. My memories of him are fragmented pieces, pieced together from stories I gathered over the

years. I saw him through the lens of a child, unable to comprehend his emotions, interests, or reasoning behind his actions.

But these memories are not entirely mine to own. Instead, they have been meticulously shaped and crafted over time to create a portrait of the man who raised me with love and care: my Dad.

My father was born and raised in a small town in Osun state, Nigeria. From a young age, he was instilled with the value of hard work. As a curious child, I often eavesdropped on adult conversations by peeping through the kitchen door. On many occasions, I heard tales of my father's early years. They spoke of his robustness as an infant, weighing in at a whopping ten pounds at birth. Looking at his appearance as an adult - with round cheeks and a large belly - it's easy to see how that might have been possible. Despite being shooed away by the adults when they wanted privacy, we children still managed to catch snippets of their stories as we grew older.

My father's dad, a stern and devout pastor, spent his days preaching and tending to his congregation. Meanwhile, his mother ran a bustling trading business from their humble two-bedroom apartment. The bathroom was situated separately from the bedrooms, a modest space that seemed almost out of place in their small home.

Despite their simple living situation, my father's parents worked hard to provide for their growing family. But as more children were welcomed into their home, expenses grew, and managing them became increasingly difficult. However, my father, with his gentle and caring nature, never hesitated to pitch in and support his family. He loved his younger siblings deeply and would do anything to ensure their well-being.

As the eldest in the family, my father embodied strength, a strong work ethic, and a generous heart. He dreamed of becoming a pilot someday but for now, took on multiple responsibilities to help his family. He willingly sacrificed for them without complaint - skipping meals when there wasn't enough food or going without new clothes for special occasions. Being a role model for his siblings brought him immense joy and he bore the weight of their expectations with grace.

Despite being busy with household chores and caring for his siblings, my father made the choice to actively seek employment. Every day, he purchased multiple newspapers and scoured them for job opportunities. He then went from place to place in search of work until he finally landed his first job as an assistant barber at one of the few barber shops in town. This job would sustain him while he awaited admission

into the university and allow him to continue supporting his family with pride and determination.

My father's heart swelled with a zealous desire to become a pilot, but the educational path to fulfil his dream seemed out of reach. Undeterred, he embarked on a tireless quest to find a solution. With the daunting financial burden in mind, he delved into alternative educational routes. After countless hours of online research and visits to various institutions, my father chanced upon a promising opportunity: a national scholarship that could pave his way to one of the most distinguished universities in Lagos. Without hesitation, he embarked on the rigorous application process.

Months went by as my father anxiously awaited news of his scholarship application. And then one day, while his mother was tending to their home, a delivery person arrived with a package intended for her son. Intrigued, she couldn't resist tearing open the envelope to see what had been sent to my father that day. Her joyful cry pierced through the air as she pulled out an admission letter from the University of Lagos. It was a simple brown envelope, but its contents held life-changing news for my father.

His mother's jubilation was infectious, and soon their humble home was bursting with celebration. Family members, neighbours, and even curious passers- by

joined in the revelry, drawn by the sounds of merri-
ment and the irresistible aroma of jollof rice wafting
from their kitchen. The atmosphere was electric with
songs and dances, and even those who didn't quite
understand the reason for the festivities found
themselves swaying along to the music.

This was a true "Mo gbo mo ya" moment - meaning I
heard about it and branched - as friends and ac-
quaintances flocked to join the celebration. The
beverages flowed freely as glass bottles of Coke,
Fanta, and Sprite were passed around with merri-
ment. Some of the adults present even uncorked a
bottle of red wine to mark the auspicious occasion. It
was a day of pure happiness and celebration for my
father and his loved ones, a moment that would be
cherished for years to come.

The celebration had finally come to an end, the col-
ourful ribbons and confetti now scattered on the
ground. As the guests bid their farewells, my father's
Dad pulled him aside for a heart-to-heart conversa-
tion. The warm glow of the setting sun created a pic-
turesque backdrop as his father emphasized that this
scholarship marked the beginning of a new chapter in
my father's life. He urged him to make the most of
the opportunity and reminded him that he was now
an adult and needed to start earning his own income.

With his younger siblings still in secondary school, they needed to focus on their studies while my Father, being older, could balance work and academics. Despite feeling a sense of responsibility towards his family, my father knew that this was his chance to chase after his dreams.

Determined to become self-sufficient, my father spent hours brainstorming ideas and strategies to make the most out of this newfound journey. He felt a strong motivation coursing through him, pushing him to go all out and seize every opportunity that came his way.

A week later, with only a simple school bag filled with his necessities, my father set off on his journey to pursue a degree in business administration at the university in Lagos State. Wise beyond his years, he arrived two months ahead of time, giving himself ample opportunities to acclimate and understand the landscape before classes began.

Despite facing financial constraints, my father refused to let go of his dream of becoming a pilot. He firmly believed that his current situation was only temporary and would eventually pass. He planned to excel with the opportunities he had been given and secure a temporary job to support himself in the meantime.

Luckily, upon his arrival in Lagos, just a few days before lectures resumed, my father managed to secure a job at a nearby barbershop. The owner, known as “Oga Samu” by the locals, was a bald man with shiny gold teeth and a tattoo of a hair clipper on his arm. His muscular physique was often showcased in sleeveless shirts as he expertly trimmed and styled hair for his customers. Despite his tough exterior, “Oga Samu” was known for being a kind and hard-working individual. In the streets of Lagos, he stood for strength, hustle, and brotherhood.

Oga Samu, a wealthy and generous man, paid his hardworking assistants 5000 naira each month, providing them with enough to cover their daily expenses. Luckily for my father, he also had a scholarship that covered his tuition fees, alleviating some of the financial burden. To save on rent costs, my father shared a cramped room with four friends on campus. His sister Yewande used to tease him during “adult conversations” about how four young men could comfortably share such a small space. To which their father would always respond with a chuckle and quote, “But godliness with contentment is great gain”.

The first two years of university were smooth sailing for my father, but things took a turn during his third year when the owner of the apartment passed away. Just a week later, still clad in mourning attire, the de-

ceased man's children descended upon the compound and evicted all the tenants. Their excuse was that the house was in an up-and-coming area and needed immediate renovations. However, they did not return any of the rent that had been paid or offer any compensation to the displaced tenants. Those who stayed beyond the eviction date returned to find their belongings scattered in the compound and their former apartments locked up tight with double guard chains and padlocks.

With nowhere else to go, Oga Samu's babershop became my father's new home. Graciously, Oga Samu lent him a mattress that my father would place in the centre of the shop at night to sleep on. During the day, he would juggle between attending classes and working at the shop. It was during one of these long, exhausting days that he crossed paths with Kunle - Oga Samu's notorious brother known for his involvement in street crimes such as violence and theft.

Upon first glance, the unmistakable family resemblance between Kunle and Oga Samu was impossible to ignore. Their shared features, such as sharp cheekbones and a pointed chin, gave away their relationship. However, unlike his older brother, Kunle was notably shorter in stature and had a broader face. His dark eyes held a perpetual glint of mischief, and his tightly pressed lips rarely formed into a smile.

The night that my father's path crossed with Kunle for the first time, the air was thick with humidity and anticipation. My father had just closed up the shop for the day and was about to turn in for the night when he heard rustling at the front door. Upon investigation, he found Kunle crouched by the lock, attempting to pick it with a safety pin. Before my father could utter a word, Kunle straightened up with practiced ease. With one swift movement, he discreetly stashed the pin in his pocket and locked eyes with my father.

"Who are you? What are you doing in our shop at this time of night?" My father asked, trying not to betray his surprise.

Kunle merely smirked and replied, "I could ask you the same thing." It was during their conversation that Kunle mentioned that he was Oga Samu's younger brother and had come to check if Oga Samu was around.

My father out of curiosity picked up his phone and said he was calling Oga Samu to confirm. On saying this, their conversation was cut short as Kunle realized he had no clear justification, causing Kunle to swiftly make his exit without another word.

As days turned into weeks, Kunle became a regular presence at the shop. At first, it was to steal small

items here and there, but soon enough he started coming around just to hang out with Oga Samu and my father. They would spend hours talking about life - girls, music, dreams - or playing video games together. It wasn't long before My Father began to see beyond Kunle's tough exterior and formed a bond with him.

One day, as they were walking through town together, Kunle opened up about his aspirations in the music industry. He shared his dream of starting a music record label and revealed that he had never known his father. My Father listened intently, realizing that there was much more to Kunle than met the eye.

Their friendship deepened over time, with my father even accompanying Kunle to the betting shops where he earned a portion of his income. Despite their differences in background and lifestyle, they found common ground and formed an unbreakable connection.

Kunle's unwavering ambition to conquer the music industry consumed every fibre of his being. Yet, his current living situation was a harsh reminder that reality often didn't align with one's dreams. As he sat on the concrete steps of his rundown apartment building, he couldn't help but lament over his constant financial struggles. The rent was past due and even basic necessities like food were becoming out of reach. It felt as though for every small step forward, he was force-

fully pushed two steps back. But Kunle refused to let his circumstances hold him back from reaching his ultimate goal. He would stop at nothing to make it big in the music world, no matter the obstacles that lay ahead.

But then came my father, with his kind heart and generous soul. Unable to bear Kunle's constant complaints any longer, he made the selfless decision to share his own salary with his struggling friend. This act of kindness only strengthened their bond, as they soon discovered they shared common interests and aspirations. With my father's support and encouragement, Kunle began to believe in himself and his dreams once again.

Their friendship continued to blossom until they were practically inseparable. Even Oga Samu, the landlord of their building, recognized their close relationship and started referring to my father as "little brother". Seeing how hardworking and dedicated my father was to supporting his family, Kunle was inspired to turn over a new leaf. No more stealing or relying on handouts - he wanted to make an honest living.

And so, Kunle set out on a job search and landed a job in Lagos, Nigeria. On top of that, he also signed a record label deal that promised payment for performances and events. Finally able to pay his rent and af-

ford basic necessities without worry, Kunle thought things couldn't get any better.

But there was still the temptation of quick money through betting shops - a difficult habit to break for Kunle. Despite having a stable income now, Kunle couldn't resist the allure of earning even more "in a sharp way". Meanwhile, My Father used his earnings wisely and saved up enough money to move into his own place. However, in true friendship fashion, they agreed to split the rent with Kunle covering most of the costs.

Kunle's music career began to take off, and he even started dreaming of expanding it internationally. The United States seemed like the perfect place for bigger opportunities. And as fate would have it, Kunle's record label planned to send him there for a performance - the start of his international journey. He flew back and forth between Nigeria and the US, making connections and furthering his career, all while earning more money than he ever thought possible. This was the opening of access to the USA for Kunle but he was interested in a permanent move alongside my Father.

Every evening, my father and Kunle would sit together, their minds spinning with the possibilities of leaving the country. They would brainstorm fervently, discussing all avenues through which they could make

their dream of going to America a reality. The stars above them twinkled in approval as they spoke, the soft rustle of leaves in the breeze adding to their sense of urgency.

At first, my father had been hesitant about the idea, seeing it as a risky leap without sufficient planning. But Kunle's unwavering enthusiasm for the American dream was contagious. He spoke of it with such passion and conviction that it was hard not to be swayed by his optimism. Some nights, Kunle even mentioned having a vivid dream where my father was able to travel with him to America and they both achieved great success.

As they continued to discuss their shared goal of going to America, my father found himself feeling inspired by Kunle's relentless determination. He had always harboured a secret passion for flying, dreaming of becoming a pilot one day, but he had never truly believed it was attainable – until now. Just as he had secured his school scholarship, My Father began actively seeking opportunities in aviation. He scoured newspapers, searched online, and applied for scholarships in the field.

My Father's hopes and dreams hinged on obtaining a government-sponsored scholarship. He spent countless hours poring over applications, perfecting every

word, determined to seize any chance that came his way.

However, after sending out over 200 applications, only four exam invitations trickled in. Devastated and crushed, my father's aspirations faded into the background as he contemplated settling for a simpler life like Oga Samu's - running a local barbershop.

But just when he thought his dreams might have to take a different path, fate intervened. One day, he received an unexpected call that would change his life forever. He was informed that he had successfully passed one of the government-backed scholarship exams and was instructed to gather all necessary documents to secure his scholarship - his ticket to travel. The only condition was that, upon gaining the necessary skills and knowledge, he would have to return to his country and use them to contribute to its development.

A scholarship for a man who once felt lost and uncertain about achieving his dreams - the joy on my father's face was immeasurable. He danced with uncontrollable excitement, just like the lively dance moves in the Nigerian hit song "Kukere." It was a moment of pure bliss, with the stars above shining even brighter in celebration of this remarkable achievement.

As the sun began to set over Lagos, Nigeria, my father's heart was heavy with anticipation and sadness. The hustle and bustle of the city had become his home, and leaving it behind would be no easy feat. He had established a life here, with belongings that held sentimental value and a family who loved him dearly.

But beyond all of this, there was one thing that made saying goodbye even more difficult: a girl named Mayowa.

With her striking beauty and sharp intelligence, Mayowa captivated my father from the moment he met her in her mother's canteen. She came from a respected family and had no shortage of admirers, but it was her kind heart and genuine friendship that drew my father in. As his departure date neared, he found himself making excuses to visit the canteen more often, just for the chance to see Mayowa's lovely face light up with a smile.

Mayowa wasn't much of a talker, but when she did speak, it was with a gentle voice that held a hint of laughter. She only spent a few days at the canteen each week, as her studies in accounting kept her busy. Unlike my father, she didn't have to balance work and academics simultaneously.

But despite their limited time together, my father couldn't help but notice how Mayowa seemed to enjoy

his company. It became clear on the day before his departure when she walked him home and found a quiet corner where they could steal a moment alone. In that secluded spot, their connection grew more intimate until their bodies were pressed together in a passionate kiss.

The world around them melted away as they clung to each other, hearts racing with emotion. My Father whispered sweet words into Mayowa's ear, confessing his love for her and promising to return from America as a successful man so they could marry. They spent the evening lost in each other's company, gazing up at the glittering stars and cherishing every second before my father's departure.

As my father excitedly shared the news of his upcoming journey to the United States with his parents, his mother immediately sprang into action, her loving care evident in the way she prepared everything he would need for the trip. She carefully selected two warm wool sweaters, a stainless steel thermos flask, three pairs of thick wool socks, a pair of sturdy sneakers, and ten nylon bags filled with essential Nigerian food items. She didn't advertise his departure to the world, but they did have a modest gathering to celebrate, with only close family members in attendance.

As the final days before my father's departure approached, time seemed to shoot by like a whirlwind of

precious moments. His siblings; Deji the gentle one in the house, Bolu the daring risk-taker, and Yewande the calming presence that brought peace and comfort, spent every waking moment they could with him. It had been far too long since they had all been together. The air was filled with joy and nostalgia as they laughed and reminisced, eagerly anticipating the adventures that awaited my father on his journey. Their hearts were full of love and bitter-sweet sadness as they savoured every second of their time together.

As night fell and it was time to retire, my father's dad paid him a visit in his room. My father's dad wanted to impart some wisdom and share the lessons he had learned in his own childhood. With a gentle hand on my father's shoulder, he spoke of the importance of hard work and determination once he arrived in America, setting the stage for his son's journey with valuable guidance.

On the morning of his departure, my father received heartfelt goodbye letters and phone calls. One came from his childhood friend and lover Mayowa, another from Oga Samu who had always been like an uncle to him, and Kunle who had been like a brother growing up. As hugs were exchanged and goodbyes said, tears were shed and emotions ran high. In the letters from his loved ones, they thoughtfully listed all the things

they wanted him to bring back upon his return. My Father carefully packed these letters among his belongings, treasuring them as if they were precious gems and carrying them as his hand luggage. Holding onto these emotional tokens tightly, he couldn't help but shed a few tears, using them as a way to remember the warmth of home while embarking on his journey.

The Mirror Lessons

Every chapter in Dad in the Mirror closes with a Mirror Lesson — a short, practical reflection you're meant to journal and apply, not just read.

In this chapter, we followed my father's story from his hometown in Osun state to the vibrant city of Lagos, where he juggles being a student and working for local barbershop owner, Oga Samu. It was at the barbershop that he met Kunle, Oga Samu's younger brother, who became the ying to my father's yang, as the two formed an inseparable bond over the years. Through their friendship, they encouraged each other to aspire for more in their different fields and this eventually led to Kunle's music career taking off and my father receiving a scholarship to an aviation school in America to fulfil his dream of becoming a pilot.

Some of the lessons and principles this chapter highlights are

1. Hard work and determination: My Father's journey exemplifies the power of hard work and determination in achieving one's goals. He pursued multiple opportunities, sought employment, and remained persistent in the face of setbacks, ultimately securing

scholarships and paving the way for his future success despite his family financial background.

2. Friendship and mutual support: My Father's friendship with Kunle illustrates the importance of mutual support and camaraderie in navigating life's challenges. Through shared experiences and aspirations, they uplifted and encouraged each other, fostering a bond built on trust and understanding. The power of friendship and support cannot be overstated in a child's life

3. Embracing opportunities: My Father's willingness to explore opportunities and embrace change led to transformative experiences and personal growth. He seized scholarships, pursued education, and ventured into new territories, demonstrating the value of stepping outside one's comfort zone.

4. Parental guidance and wisdom: My father received wise advice and encouragement from his father. This highlights the importance of parental guidance and mentorship in shaping one's values and aspirations. His father's words served as a guiding light during his journey as we will read ahead.

5. Financial literacy: My Father was financially prudent and this enabled him to take care of himself and still have enough left to split bills and share with Kunle. As parents, encourage your sons to delve into

the realm of financial literature and acquaint themselves with the principles of budgeting through hands-on practices such as managing physical piggy banks. These lessons will instil in them an appreciation for prudent spending and saving, steering them toward financial prudence and autonomy as they venture into adulthood.

As a parent, these are foundational lessons to impart to your sons. The values of industriousness, curiosity, accountability, and empathy should be instilled in them from a tender age. Teach them that diligent effort is noble and that they shouldn't expect to coast on the sweat of others. Educate them on the core tenets of success and responsibility. They will forever be grateful to you for it.

THIS WAS ONE CHAPTER OF TWENTY

The rest of the story — and nineteen more Mirror Lessons — is waiting.

This preview covers Part I, Chapter One. The book continues through struggle, forgiveness, a sudden loss, and the words almost left unsaid — all the way to Part V, where the author becomes a father himself.

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