

BOOK REVIEW

Issah Hassan Tikumah 2013 *Baptism of Orphanhood*, Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Co, Houston. ISBN 978-1-61897-549-2

The auto-biography details the life of being raised as an orphan from a very young age, through to a successful adult. The reader is given a strong picture of what it must have been like to be an orphan in Ghana. Issah Hassan Tikumah details both the emotions and the physical experiences that he had at various ages, in a clear and engaging manner. Tikumah was born in Tamale, and suffered the unfortunate loss of both his mother and father. In doing so, he talks about the loss of the primary love that only a parent can give their child.

Tikumah provides an overview of his experiences based on those that impacted upon him the most. Tikumah is selective in what he shares and is very clear about the impact this had on him as a person. As such, we are introduced to a very resilient person who overcame much adversity. In addition, Tikumah gives an insight into the social structure in Ghana and how that influenced his upbringing.

We see a slightly rebellious person; ultimately taking charge of himself and his own destiny, leading to a positive outcome.

The book certainly adds to the literature on the subject, and there are a number of occasions where the beliefs of the reader can be challenged. An example of this is his belief in the value of corporal punishment for young children as a means of managing their behaviour and upbringing. The reader builds a picture of what it was like to live at this time in Ghana, and also the social interactions and complexities that existed. We gain an insight into different belief systems that impact so strongly on how young people are treated and raised to adulthood.

The author admits that he was fortunate in having the ability to study, having an excellent recall of facts. Tikumah describes a range of occupations, with all of them leading eventually to studying at the University of New England, Sydney. Throughout the story there are some twists that demonstrate the very characteristics that enabled him to break free from the considered Ghana lifestyle; twists that keep the reader engaged.

Throughout the book, there was a strong sense of powerlessness as a young person, with so many other people controlling a life. As an orphan, the loss of connection with parents is profound, and the influence of people who are not always supportive in your best interests, is evident. Tikumah explains that orphans are seen as being responsible for all of the bad things

that happen, and are assumed always to be the guilty party, and given the most menial of tasks.

Tikumah is honest in his writing, creating frequent connections throughout the book, supporting his accurate and informative narrative of life as an orphan. He explores some of the reasons behind people's actions, and includes with the narrative, some first person paragraphs. Tikumah includes typical sayings from the Ghana people which engage the reader. There is also a message about the importance of higher education to bring people out of their existing lifestyle, describing himself as a scholar with a focus on self-improvement. At times Tikumah took a slightly philosophical look, such as relating that our parents want a better life for their children than they had themselves.

For someone who is studying the differences between African countries, and the impact of being an orphan in such cultures, this provides a useful reference. It is the perspective of one person as they go through life, which includes Ghana, his travels and experience in Australia. It is well written and explains how a person can change their life through a positive approach to what others may see as adversity. Tikumah shares insights into cultural pressures at home, and the difficulties that he had to cope with when taking the risk of travelling to a different country such as Australia to study.

Author

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Birth Canal Under a Microscope

You don't remember your original slippery slide; the tight hessian that tickled you on the way down head-first; how natural fibres left a soft caress on tissue, an itch to escape. Gravity pushed too like a circus strongman, but muscles mostly ignited your momentum; like the rifling inside a gun will cork-crew a bullet, you too were spun clockwise at times, but on a slow cycle, as the tip of your head emerged through the long barrel of your mother's birth canal. Fibres like shag carpet strands laid wall to wall, pink as baby marsupials in the pouch; echidna's potential as they twist their way teatward. A fig half. A cake's delicate piping work of wave crests; rosy icing that slid down the layers & set a new rich shine to you.

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