

Last week the United States celebrated its independence. Not to be left out in the celebrations, Nigerians in the country took the opportunity the long weekend afforded to participate in memorable events of their own. Although Nigerians around the country celebrated the holiday in numerous ways, I will here highlight two particularly significant events.

The first was the reunion for alumni of Hillcrest School, an international missionary school located in Jos. Every three years, the Hillcrest Alumni Association organises a reunion for the numerous 'Cresters' around the world as an opportunity for them to get together and reminisce about the old days in Nigeria. This year's event took place in Dallas, Texas, and attracted around 200 people. As Hillcrest was mostly populated by the sons and daughters of expatriate missionaries prior to 1985, most of the attendees were people who at first glance would not appear to be 'Nigerian.'

In spite of appearances, 'Cresters' of all ages came together to celebrate in proper Nigerian fashion at an event highlighted by a football match, a concert by a

Reunions

Nigerian musician, a talent show, and a specially catered Nigerian meal. A number of those in attendance were members of a group known as the 'originals,' so named because they were among the first to attend the school after it was opened in Jos in 1942. Many of these people have not set foot in Nigeria since the 1950s, yet the memories are still so strong that they make a point of attending events like the Hillcrest reunion. Such people are living testaments to the strong appeal Nigeria has had over the years to people from other lands who were able to make it their home.

The other event was a much bigger affair and generally for a younger crowd. Taking place a few hours down the road from the Hillcrest reunion in Dallas, the 4th Annual Nigerian Reunion was held in Houston. Organized by the Nigerian Reunions Committee (NRC), the event was designed to bring together Nigerian secondary school graduates

Wiebe Boer
Perspective of a Nigerian-American



•Boer

now in the diaspora. Of course Nigerians who were not opportuned to school at home were invited also.

Young Nigerians from all over the United States and Canada descended on Houston for the reunion, completely colo-

nizing the Radisson Hotel and Convention Center. One attendee commented, "Over all these NRC events are a step in the right direction - bringing Nigerians together. I think that is the big plus of it. I saw people I had not seen in 12 years."

The event, attended by some 600 people, featured all sorts of activities ranging from business forums to all night parties. The closing event, the Ebony Nite Banquet, was a grand occasion with all aspects of Nigerian culture proudly on display. The featured speaker was Emmanuel Onunwor, the Nigerian-born mayor of East Cleveland, Ohio. In his speech, he encouraged young Nigerians not to forget where they came from, reminding them that there was no need to try and conform one's accent, behaviour, and style to an American one to be successful abroad. Honourable Joe Keshi, the Consul General from the Nigerian Consulate in Atlanta, also spoke and encouraged those in attendance to contribute their knowledge and education to the development of Nigeria.

Danlami Gomwalk, an engineering student presently at Lafayette College, Pennsylvania loved the opportu-

nity to interact with so many other Nigerians since at school he is the only Nigerian around. Gomwalk noted, "I felt a oneness and a feeling of nostalgia for home. With the food, outfits, posing, gisting and yabbing going on all around, as well as the 102F temperature, one could almost feel as if they were back home. I kept bumping into old friends who I did not even know were in the United States!"

Unfortunately, I was not able to personally attend either of the reunions because I was preparing for a reunion of my own - a return to Nigeria. By the time you read this, by the grace of God I will be back in Nigeria for a lengthy stay. Because of this, my column as it now stands will cease to exist as it is obvious that I cannot write articles on Nigeria and the Nigerian diaspora from an international perspective while in Nigeria! However, my column will hopefully return to these pages soon in a different format.

I want to therefore take this opportunity to thank Punch Newspaper for giving me this unbelievable opportunity to communicate to the Nigerian public. I look forward to discussing many of the issues I have addressed in this column personally with readers upon my return. A big thank you goes out to Lekan Otufodunrin of Punch Newspapers who 'discovered' me at a conference in Abuja in June 1999. And of course none of this would have been possible without the vision of Sunday Punch editor Bankole Falade and the risk he was willing to take by letting such a young man write for such a vast audience. I hope that I have done him proud. Without his constant support and encouragement even at such a distance, I would never have been able to keep it up week in and week out.

More broadly speaking, I would like to express my gratitude to the people of Taraba and Plateau States who nurtured me during my upbringing in Nigeria. The wonderful experiences I had in my childhood contributed to the deep love I have for Nigeria and my confidence in its positive future. And finally, to all the Nigerians at home and abroad who have accepted me as one of their own, I look forward to joining hands with you as we continue to build this great nation. Arise oh compatriots, Nigeria's call obey.

Healing the whole man

CHIGBOEKWEALO

In the modern age, the practice and conduct of medicare has taken an exclusive scientific approach. The philosophy of orthodox health care is basically used and western-trained medical officers see themselves as the exclusive authority on the nature of man and disease. While this medical technique ought to be praised for its breakthroughs in deciphering in detail the atomistic nature of disease and for its remarkable achievements in the area of surgery, the orthodox healthcare system unfortunately does not capture the total person in its treatment techniques. Rather, its efforts are geared towards alleviation or suppression of pain, and treatment of selective physical diseases since it is ill-equipped to explore other related areas like the spiritual or psychic nature of man. Daisaku Ikeda explained that western medical science, because of its analytic approach and specialized attitudes towards life, misconceives the true nature of human illness. It considers illness as separate entity and though it pos-

sesses great knowledge about pathological conditions, disregards the human being who actually suffers from illness.

This limitation inherent in orthodox medicine is intensified by the development of specialised practice. In line with the nature of science, from which this healthcare philosophy is derived, over-concentration on a particular point ends up missing the unique nature and special attributes in a thing or in man. Thus, the western specialist practice, which is beneficial and important with regard to advanced scientific research, unfortunately makes a doctor see a human being as a detached specimen whose total life is easily forgotten.

Thus, western doctors use selective treatment and depend on trial and error as the paradigm base for practice. When a patient comes, the belief is that diseases are uniformly originated and thus have a uniform cure. Diagnoses, therefore, are with a view to revealing known symptoms, never a quest for special and unique origins except in rare cases.

All these are at variance with holistic alternative healthcare procedure and practice, where emphasis is on an individual as a unique being that has a spiritual, social, emotional, psychic and physical nature. Although diagnoses can start from any point, it is expected to cover every aspect. Thus, the basis of holistic medicine, examples of which are traditional and Oriental medical practice, rests on the affinity between man and Nature/God, and the belief that Nature has the capacity to heal itself. Basically, the attempt is always to help the individual re-establish a rhythm with other elements in nature, and thereby other minor inharmonies bordering on the physical are easily addressed.

By this, holistic medicine tries to find harmony between the patient and his surroundings, based on the belief in the unity of all things - man, animals, the 'inanimate' world and the build-up of positive, moral thought. Medicine is therefore aligned with morality and whenever one experi-

ences disease or adverse circumstances, it is believed that the patient has disobeyed or caused disequilibrium through his conduct.

The philosophical basis of holistic and alternative medicine is in line with the spirit of the teachings of Hippocrates and his pupils, who are regarded as the patrons and fathers of medicine. In their writings and treatment, the patient was seen as a psychomatic and spiritual unity, dependent on their social and physical environment. Attention was therefore not restricted to the physical symptoms alone, but made to cover the entire environment and nature of the patient, including his world view.

Sir William Osler aptly summarised this thesis thus: "Ask not what kind of illness the patient has; rather ask what kind of patient has the illness." Holistic medicine, which underlies traditional African and Oriental medical practice, has in recent times been receiving newer attention, especially in Euro-America.

As further prop of holistic medicine, I would especially canvass for the use of divina-

tion in healthcare. Such divination systems as the Ifa and Ava methods, which have been developed by Professors Abimbola and Onwujeogwu, should be entered into the syllabus of therapeutic spiritualism, so as to achieve harmony between medicine, spiritualism and mysticism. This will foster man's attunement and oneness with nature, leading to health, balance and development.

It should be possible for a holistic health clinic to bring together an orthodox doctor, a herbalist, a diviner, a homeopath, a priest (traditional and western), a mystic, a moral philosopher, et cetera, who would sit in council to listen to patients' complaints. All these specializations would be harmonized under the direction of a medical philosopher, whose duty is to synthesize the divergent techniques and show the basic unity and essence underlying their methodologies and practices. When this is achieved, medical officers would then qualify to be called practitioners of the benevolent healing art, the term used for them by the Japanese.

Ekwealo is of the University of Lagos.