



His Nigerian Dream and Desire

to our neighbourhood. I lived in the GRA then," Wiebe narrates.

"This local group were destroying houses in the neighbourhood. Some people came to our compound and we hid them. Then the vigilante came and said we know that you are hiding our enemies and we are going to get you also. They were busy breaking down the gates and I was like let me say my last prayers that this is the end of my journey in Nigeria which started and ended in Jos. And from nowhere it started raining I mean heavy down pour and they left. That was my close shave with death. That was when my romantic love of Jos changed because I saw a new side of Jos. The memory is still there and it is still a beautiful place."

With a Nigerian mentality, Wiebe experienced a culture shock during his academic exploits after spending 18 years in Nigeria. He said: "I went to Calving College in Michigan for my first degree. It was a culture shock because growing up in Nigeria. I am not just an Oyinbo but the pure one: blonde hair, blue eyes very pale. All my life I always stand out and anytime I am in a crowd you can see me. When we were travelling and stopped on the road people would run to touch my hair, skin.

"So I am used to that and while I went for an undergraduate in a university where most of the students were children of Dutch immigrants they all looked exactly like me and I hated it. And so from the day I started I wore something that was made with Nigerian fabrics and I would stand out. So I was a bit different; the identity issue was a bit extreme. When I look back I think I overdid it but at that time I didn't want anyone to think I was part of them even to a point that I had a jacket covered up with jukun – a fabric from Taraba – so that even in Winter I always looked different."

Wiebe though a European will pass for as an African. The reason is simple. He has always been drawn to Africa. At Yale University, he was Graduate President of the Yale African Student Association. His career exploits have also revolved around Africa. In 2012, the Tony Elumelu Foundation selected him as its inaugural CEO following his

recruitment from the Rockefeller Foundation – one of the world's leading charitable foundations with over 90 years of commitment to Africa. Wiebe's previous experience includes working at McKinsey.

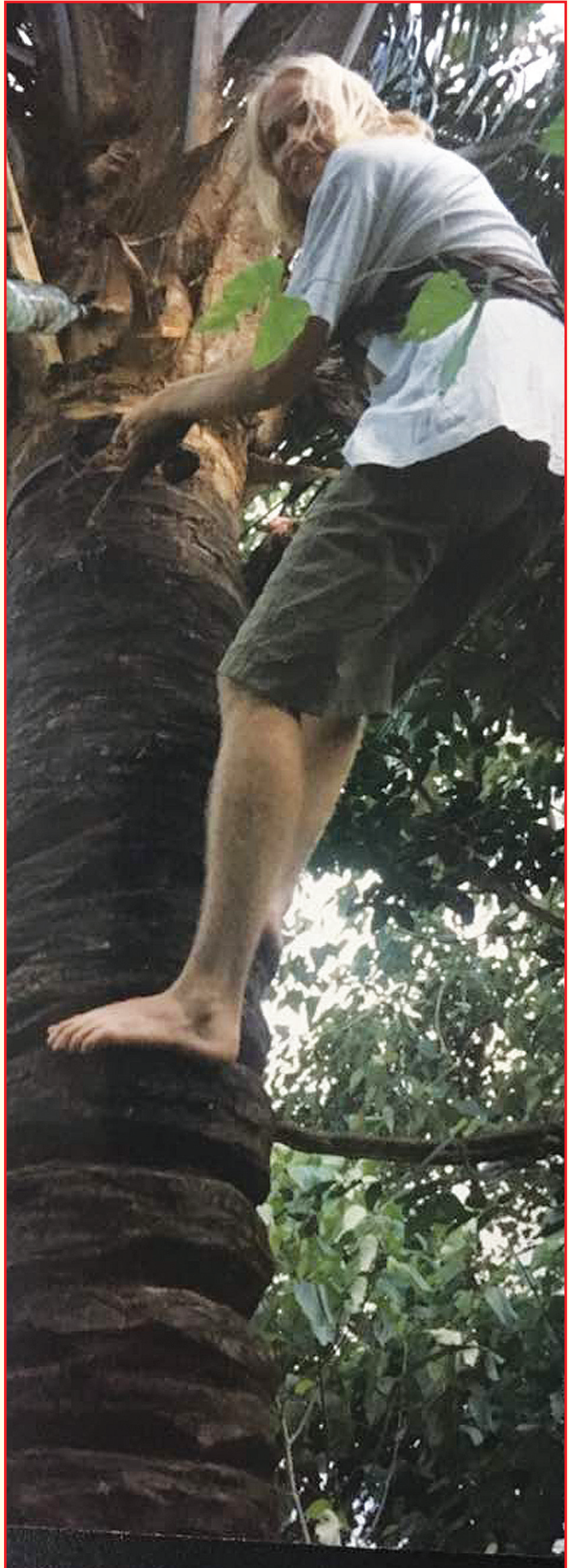
Wiebe studied history up to a doctorate and has written more than three books including 'Invest in Africa: Unlocking the Potential' his latest work, 'A Story of Heroes and Epics: The History of Football in Nigeria (1904-1960)'. He said studying history has to do with an identity issue. When Wiebe was 16, he went to an immigration office to apply for Nigerian citizenship. He was born to missionaries in Jos and had lived all his life in Nigeria – moving between towns and cities in the north. So, he had nominally fulfilled the conditions of naturalization – which says you must have resided in Nigeria for a continuous period of 15 years. But he was denied the citizenship he craved.

"It was the first time in my life that I actually knew I was not a Nigerian. I studied African history because I wanted to know about Africa more than anybody. In addition, getting a doctorate is a good credential to have," Wiebe recalls with a sense of dashed expectations.

The pioneer CEO of Shell's 'All On' has big dreams for Nigeria. His firm is noted for making the first investments in Nigeria's off-grid power market, aimed at facilitating increased access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy sources for low income households, small scale enterprises, and communities in the country.

He adds: "What 'All On' is doing is going step further to solve the electricity problem with more efficient energy source. And that is what we are trying to do using solar, hydro, gas etc. We have an investment company that invests in companies that provide the services. The industry is new and it takes time but based on what I have seen we can be optimistic that there would be a revolution in power in Nigeria just like we experienced in telecoms."

For Wiebe, it has been an amazing journey. "I have spent almost 30 years of my life in Nigeria. Every Nigerian that I have met is friendly, welcoming and amazing. Nigeria is interesting; living in Nigeria is an adventure," he says with pride.



Learning how to tap palm wine in Cross River State in 1995