



Me, My Mother, My Life: A Journey Through Pain and Healing

Ayomide Adeniola

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Culture clash meets generation gap in this memoir by Ayomide Adeniola, a first-time author born in London and raised in southern Nigeria. *Me, My Mother, My Life* unflinchingly explores dysfunctional family relationships, the strong bond between mother and daughter, and that daughter's search for her own identity.

Adeniola is one of four children who grew up near Lagos in a family headed by a strong-willed mother. "Mum" worked tirelessly as a nurse manager to provide for her family in the absence of any consistent contribution from her abusive and mostly absent husband. Widely respected in her community, Mum was far from perfect at home. Adeniola captures the confusion she experienced growing up when her mother would heap responsibility on her and later blame her for anything that had gone wrong.

This confusion, so characteristic of dysfunctional families, was compounded by the fact that Adeniola's family was extensive, and there were many relatives who weighed in on each decision. Nigerian culture, Adeniola writes, encourages families to make decisions as a whole and discourages individual action. Thus, when Adeniola became engaged, the courtship was intensely supervised by both families and their churches. Combine this with Mum's unpredictable reactions—first she is horrified that her daughter is engaged, and later is equally appalled when the engagement falters—and the result is extremely uncomfortable for Adeniola when she moves back to London as a young adult to seek her independence.

Although physical violence was a part of Adeniola's upbringing, she does not focus on those events as much as the emotional, interpersonal struggles that persisted even after all of the children were adults. Through snippets of letters and phone calls, she shows the constant miscommunications and manipulations that plagued her. Adeniola recounts her inner thoughts as well, revealing her acute sense of persecution. The other side to the story is indeed exposed when Adeniola's efforts to work through her feelings lead her to acknowledge her own role in the family dynamics.

Long, journal-like musings extend this memoir unnecessarily. Since Adeniola writes her thoughts and feelings quite clearly, there seems little point to the repetition that makes this a 350-page book. With less focus on the mundane aspects of daily living and more lively dialogue, Adeniola could tell an engaging story in perhaps half the pages.

Adeniola's memoir remains compelling because of the strong family bond that comes through no matter how contentious the conversation. With *Me, My Mother, My Life*, Adeniola uncovers the basic truth of many family arguments: we wouldn't fight so much if we didn't care so deeply.

SHEILA M. TRASK (November 1, 2012)

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