

## **Struggling hard to embark on my momentous journey – Sample Chapter**

‘Oda, Oda! Oda!’ I shouted at the top of my voice as I flagged down a vehicle that was approaching the outskirts of our little settlement, still about 300 metres away from where I stood.

As the vehicle drew closer to me, the waving and shouting on my part increased in intensity.

‘Stop, please stop!’ I kept shouting.

The vehicle approached me, maintaining a constant speed. The driver seemed to pay no attention to the teenager requesting him to stop. At last, he responded to me – not favourably, though. Turning his face towards me for a moment, he gesticulated with one hand indicating that there was no seat left for me.

With disappointment written all over my face, I could only watch the heavily laden vehicle as it crawled along the rugged road that cut through the middle of our village, dividing it in almost two equal halves.

As the vehicle drove on, it churned up a trail of thick dust. Though it was September, and we were not anywhere close to the dry season, which in our part of the country set in from around the middle of December and lasted till the end of February, for the last several days the rains had stayed away.

The state of the Nkawkaw- Akim Oda road! Ever since I was big enough to understand, there had been talk of plans by the government to put asphalt on the main trunk road linking the two most important towns in the area: Nkawkaw, about 30 kilometres to the north of our village, and Akim Oda, about 70 kilometres to the south of us. Even as I was surrounded by the thick cloud of dust that momentarily threatened to suffocate me, I recalled that putting asphalt on the road was one of the election promises of the MP for our area during the parliamentary election campaign two years before. Since his party won the election and formed the government of the day, not only had he not shown up in the area, but nothing had been heard about his promise.

Whereas his opponents accused him of a breach of electoral promise, his party faithfully responded by saying it was too early to make the accusation since the party had been in power for less than two years.

It was not then the right time to engage in big political issues, however. On that particular day, as far as I was concerned, what was important for me was to find a vehicle that would convey me safely to Akim Oda, to the premises of the Akim Oda Secondary School to be precise. I had been admitted as a Form One student, and it was the opening day for first year students. The rest of the student population were expected in school the next day.

Though disappointed that I was refused a place in the vehicle, I nevertheless understood the driver’s reason for rejecting me – the vehicle was chock-a-block full of passengers, with no seats available. As if that were not enough, three male passengers stood on the tailboard of the vehicle, each of them holding tightly part of the wooden frame that formed the roof, for support. As I blew the dust off my neatly ironed school uniform – khaki trousers with a blue short-sleeved shirt – I could only hope that it would not be hours before the next bus turned up, and that when it arrived there would be room for me! Partly as a result of the poor state of the road, and also due to the rural nature of the area of the country we lived in, there was very little by way of vehicular activity along the road.

As the day progressed without me getting the opportunity to embark on my momentous journey, I became quite unsettled. Would I get the opportunity to travel that day at all? Or would I be forced to postpone my journey that day and hope for better luck the next day?

Finally, just after midday, another vehicle appeared on the horizon, heading towards the village. I kept praying for a better outcome. As it approached me, at first it seemed the driver was going to ignore my signal to stop. Indeed, it drove past me! But just as my heart sank with the thought that I had missed the last available lift that day, it unexpectedly pulled to a stop!

The driver's mate, who was standing on the tailboard for lack of space within the vehicle, hurriedly got down, took up a wooden 'choc' and placed it behind one of the two rear tyres. Those not conversant with the mechanisms of the vehicle might wonder why this extra

precaution was needed. Didn't the vehicle possess a handbrake that could be applied to keep it stationary? My guess is that the handbrake was probably not functioning properly. Even if it did, it probably would not have prevented the overloaded vehicle from rolling backwards!

'Where are you heading for?' the driver's mate asked.

'Akim Oda,' I replied.

'Well, as you can see for yourself, there are no seats left. Fortunately a few of the passengers will alight at Afosu. You will have to stand between the rows until we get there.'

'Thank you very much for your help!' I shouted on the top of my voice. Though having to stand between the rows for the approximately six-kilometre drive to Afosu was not an optimal solution, everyone present – my parents, my sisters and friends who had gathered to bid me farewell – were relieved because at long last, I was able to start my journey.