

Out of Africa: One Chapter President's Personal Journey

By **Adelaide Odoteye**, CPA-Abilene, Guest Columnist

As an avid reader growing up in Zimbabwe, her childhood ambition was to be a librarian, preferably isolated on an island that stocked an endless supply of books. In high school, that goal morphed into a desire to pursue medicine. Yet **Adelaide Odoteye** ended up as a CPA and the president of the TSCPA chapter in Abilene, Texas.

Odoteye was born in Accra, the capital city of the West African country of Ghana. She is the second of three children born to Emmanuel, a mechanical engineer, and Dorothy, a teacher. Her late sister Sylvia was about a year older (one year, two months, one week, two days older to be exact – but who's counting?) and her brother Derek is three years younger. She grew up bilingual in English and a little-known Ghanaian language called Ga. When Odoteye was 6 years old, her family moved to Harare, Zimbabwe, in Southern Africa. What a culture shock! Food, clothing styles, cultural norms, currency and indigenous languages were all different. However, because both Ghana and Zimbabwe are former British colonies, they have English in common as the official language – the language for education, business and formal transactions.

Her journey to accounting was far from linear. In her youth, Odoteye's creative side was very dominant. She participated in choir, public speaking, theater, debating, wrote fiction and poetry, and enjoyed drawing and sewing. The arts were an intuitive outlet that allowed free reign to originality, with few prescribed formulae or rules. Odoteye was most content when immersed in a book, transported by words on the written page and a vivid imagination. This love of literature bred a childhood desire to be a librarian, based on the misconception that a librarian's sole task was to read all day. As reality and maturity intruded on this fantasy, she began to develop an interest in the sciences, particularly mathematics and biology. Due to the fact that she had worn glasses from the age of 10, she was especially fascinated by ophthalmology.

At age 14 at the beginning of high school, she took history as an elective instead of accounting. However, she would hear whispers about debits and credits from the accounting students, and was subliminally intrigued by this mysterious language. Following high school, she endeavored to combine her aspiration to travel the world with pursuing a degree by applying to universities around the globe for degrees in the medical field, particularly ophthalmology, dentistry or physiotherapy. In the meantime, she took a part-time course in accounting at a local college, "just to understand what those debits and credits meant."

The logic, mathematics and writing required for accounting instantly appealed to her, and the focus of her university applications switched to accounting. She chose Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas, for several reasons: the personalized attention demonstrated by the International Student Office, the offer of an



Adelaide Odoteye, CPA-Abilene

academic scholarship, the small-city setting and the mundane, yet significant fact that her aunt had friends who could pick her up from DFW Airport. She landed in January 2002. The United States adventure had begun.

There were many humorous moments of adapting to a different culture: what on Earth is this tasty, but unidentifiable slab of meat called "chicken fried steak;" what is the definition of "fixin' to;" and is such abundant affability from total strangers completely normal in Texas? The more subtle challenges included curbing the urge to spell "colour" instead of "color," searching the Internet to convert liters into gallons or animatedly explaining that she wanted a "trolley" at the grocery store, also known as a shopping cart.

During college, Odoteye participated in the accounting Society, various honors societies and served as an editor of a student arts publication, which featured student poetry, prose and artwork. In 2005, she graduated summa cum laude and as valedictorian with her Bachelor of Business Administration degree, and with a Master of Business Administration degree in 2006, each with a 4.0 GPA. Thereafter, she began employment with Davis Kinard & Co, PC in Abilene. She obtained her CPA license in 2010.

She credits her employer's strong history of involvement with TSCPA for introducing her to professional volunteerism. Because the firm encourages its professional staff to be members of TSCPA's Abilene Chapter, she gradually became involved with the organization and the community. With a legacy of past TSCPA chairmen and past chapter presidents, there are many stellar examples within the firm from whom to draw inspiration and obtain advice.



Adelaide Odoteye's sister Sylvia



Adelaide Odoteye's family: Sister-in-law Sandra, brother Derek, mother Dorothy, father Emmanuel, niece Alanna and Adelaide.

Odoteye still finds creative outlets for her right-brained persona: she still writes fiction and composes poetry, enjoys music and singing, and is an indomitable Manchester United Football Club (soccer) supporter. She is an enthusiastic food lover (both cooking and eating), an adventurous traveler and a recent fan of Indian cinema. She is the proud aunt of 18-month old Alanna.

However, accounting satisfies her need for logic, organization and client service, in addition to being a versatile discipline that is the foundation for many career options. Serving as chapter president

provides an opportunity to collaborate with like-minded individuals, to serve the profession and the community, and to hone her leadership skills. She would advise new CPAs to remember that the profession is what they do, not the sum total of who they are. Like anything worth doing, be willing to devote the dedication required to succeed, but enhance that with other interests. Most importantly, savor each step of the journey, for who knows where it will take you?

Editor's Note: This column was written by its subject, Adelaide Odoteye, in her creative third-person voice.



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