

Taking Charity Across the Border

Ogbonnaya and Joy Amazu are a couple of like minds. They are both from privileged backgrounds but are ready to move out of their comfort zones through a charity organisation that is set to reach out to the world, writes **FUNKE OLAODE**

He can best be described as an activist philanthropist who wants to get everyone involved in his crusade to make the world a better place.

However, he has been doing it in his home state through Challenge 100, which is already providing full scholarships to enable 100 children attend Spring Garden Primary School in Nnewi, Eastern Nigeria. These children come from deprived backgrounds and would not otherwise be able to get an education if not for the philanthropist gesture like the Amazus.

With a successful outing in his hometown, Sir Ogbonnaya Amazu, popularly known as OG, and his wife, Joy have challenged themselves to fund 100 inspiring projects in Nigeria, Britain and around the world.

“Challenge 100 is about making things happen – investing in projects, small and big, that change people’s lives forever. It’s a personal challenge for us, but we would like you to make it your challenge too,” he said in a recent encounter with the Glitterati.

For those who have followed his life trajectory of OG, the Nnewi, Anambra-born and chief executive officer of Amazoil, would attest to the fact that passion for humanity runs in the family. His multi-millionaire father and transport magnate, late Sir Lawrence Amazu, was a man of my parts who touched many lives and left his foot on the sands of time. And for his last son, his latest move is more of the continuation of the good work his late father left behind, but, this time, taking it a step further.

For a young man who has seen it all, giving back to the society won’t be too much for him. The Amazus’ profile can make their peers green with envy. Having successfully piloted his company as CEO of Amazoil Group, a company specialising in oil trade, consultancy, and strategy and with an impressive turnover yearly, OG has a passion for the business, as well as passion for life, a thirst for adventure and a desire to make a positive impact on the world.

His wife, Lady Joy, from the renowned Dafinone family of Delta State has also joined her husband’s crusade. Joy qualified as a chartered accountant with Horwath Clark Whitehill and became a member of both the ICAEW & ICAN, in doing so, setting a Guinness World Record for the most chartered accountants in one family along with her father Chief David Dafinone and her three brothers and sister.

She worked in high profile establishments before she quit in 2006 to join her husband’s business. Blessed with two children, OG and his wife are devoted to their two daughters, and have involved the girls in community work from a young age. They want the girls to grow up with a sense of responsibility for their actions and an understanding of their impact in the world. Challenge 100 is a fantastic opportunity to show them how simple action can bring lasting change.

Throwing more light on what ‘Challenge 100’ and ‘OG Challenge’, OG said he and adventurer, Justin Packshaw, are undertaking a series of personal challenges to raise awareness on Challenge 100 and to bring attention to the importance of the projects.

There are a hundred projects and within that there is ‘Challenge OG’. He explained thus: “I have got to do minimum of 10 Challenges that push me out of my comfort zone so that I can say if I can do what is uncomfortable for me, the least you can do is put your hand in your pocket or answer a phone call and bless somebody or a widow who is hungry, knock on her



OG and wife, Joy

door and see how she is doing.

“If I can challenge myself to do what I am not comfortable doing I want to challenge people to impact lives. For instance, I can’t swim. And the first thing I did was to break that fear with Captain Justin, my expedition partner. I jumped in the middle of an ocean in Dubai and learnt how to swim properly for the first time. That was a risk and challenge. I didn’t know I could do it. I challenged myself and thought I could do better. I was so inspired to do more.

“The second challenge was jet skiing to the Isle of Wight in England in the middle of winter. We did that in January. The next challenge was the jet skiing we did between the East Coast of Cameroun to Benin Republic. The first time it was done it was challenging because we had to deal with pirates, sharks, water pythons, water snakes, mechanical failure, fatigue, and logistics. This is to draw deliberate attention. I want people to say why he is doing that. To ask a question that is he showing off?

“No. Just to draw deliberate attention that if I can do this, you can do it. My goal is to target the rich and let them do something. If you are spending 40,000 pounds a year on something you like. It is okay. What we are saying is that you can set aside 5,000 pounds every year and that money can put 25 kids through public primary education from beginning to the end.

“So it is like a case of building of a lifestyle of giving. For my wife and I, our goal is to get involved with 100 charity projects around the world, not only in Nigeria but anywhere in the world. And we are open to people to tell us anything in their area or community in which they think is a good idea; whether they are building a

hospital in Nnewi or paying for 100 kids to go to primary school from beginning to the end, we don’t mind. We want to do 100 projects in five years around the world.

And why is OG and his wife taking the project beyond Nigeria? “Nigerians are everywhere and there is no restriction to where we can be and not be. If the fire can be ignited in Nigeria, praise to God. My father said something before he died that you can impact lives from anywhere.”

Of all the challenges that he has embarked on, people will consider it as pleasurable juxtaposing this against his target audience, the rich and the beneficiary audience: How does he bridge the gap? OG rose in defense of his actions... “That is exactly what we are doing. How do you justify this as an elitist thing? Somebody said this to me at the airport that charity is for rich people. America is the biggest giving nation in the world. All these things I am doing are challenging but not elitist.

“Jumping in the ocean is not elitist. There are guys who fish in the water in the creek. A jet skid is a tour and juxtaposing it with a challenge, it is very hard. There are people in Nigeria risking their lives using canoes pushing timber, sand and fuel. They are not being elitist and people are not talking about it. We are taking this to a whole new level. We are embarking on another one such as climbing Mount Everest, which is one of our goals, go to North Pole next year April and later to the South Pole.

“I want people to challenge us that why is this guy embarking on risky and crazy things? It brings the question: Why? I can inspire one person to go and do a similar thing. Why? I am doing this so that people can do it. Bill Gates is one of the biggest

givers in the world and they are very public about what they do. It is not because they want to show off but they want to encourage people to do something that if I can do this, do something to impact lives. That is what we are saying that we don’t want money but you can assist us indirectly. What we are saying is that if you identify a project and an architect says it will cost \$40,000, and you want to contribute, we will give you the contact of the architect, you verify, have your impact in the project, pay them directly and let’s do it quickly”.

According to OG, it took him 10 years to reach this point, and in case that passion dies, what measures are being put in place to ensure continuity? Beaming with gentle smiles... “That is exactly what I am doing, because for you to make your passion work and sustainable, you have got to enjoy doing it. It is a powerful motivator. Three things are key: ego, philanthropy and commerce are very powerful. If you want to jump out of the sky and make you feel good to raise money for charity, do it. But behind the ego, don’t wait until you become a millionaire or billionaire to affect people’s lives. If people can copy what we are doing right now and it even inspires another person in 100 years to come, we have done something and it will be on record that somebody once put their lives and money at risk”.

If there only one thing that would give him pleasure, OG says it is to leave a lasting legacy. “I will be a happy man if in 20 years’ time a young man walks up to me and says that little assistance of many years ago changed his life. That will be a powerful message that life is about impacting humanity and society at large,” he concluded.