Nobody Grows Alone

What Growth Requires, and Who Owes It to You

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Chapter 1

Behind Every Success, Someone Showed Up

The shift. You may believe that the young people who succeed did it by their own strength. Look closer. Behind each of them, there was a person who showed up. This book asks whether that person could be you.

Nobody grows alone. Not the young person who seems to have it all figured out, and not the one who seems to be struggling with everything at once. Behind every young person who makes it through, there is someone who showed up. Through school, through heartbreak, through the years when the whole world seems to be testing them, someone was there. A parent who stayed up. A mentor who noticed. A stranger who happened to care at exactly the right moment. The need does not end with youth: the worker, the new parent and the retired elder also grow because someone showed up.

This book is written for every reader, whatever your age or stage of life. It is written above all for the young people the author cared about most, who are trying to find their footing. It is also written for everyone standing close enough to help them find it. Those helpers are themselves still growing, and they still need someone to show up for them. Growth was never meant to be a solo project. Pretending otherwise is how too many young people fall through the cracks that a little attention would have

caught.

Most people know who young people are: those who come after childhood and before full adulthood, often called adolescents, teenagers or young adults. In this book the term covers roughly the ages of 10 to 29. In many countries they make up a very large share of the population. Every country relies on them for much of its workforce, and they add in no small measure to its development. Many see them as the hope of the nation, its dream of greatness and its future leaders. No country can afford to neglect them.

Understanding the Factors That Combine to Shape Who Youths Are

Beyond these features that set young people apart, most people know very little about them, and especially about the forces that shape who they become. A young person is the product of many forces. Some are local, belonging to the individual and perhaps the family. Others are national, shared by almost all young people in a country. Some are global, felt by young people everywhere, though in different measure from region to region. Some are educational, some spiritual and some social. Anyone who wants to help young people in a real way must therefore take time to study them and understand their needs, as individuals and as a group. That understanding shows how to help each young person and the group they belong to. Sadly, most people and organisations that try to help rarely have any detailed information about a young person, or a group of them, before they begin. The young people are

then no better off, and everyone ends up frustrated and discouraged.

This book is written for everyone who genuinely cares about young people and wants to help them. It begins with understanding, and understanding begins with their characteristics. Most young people share some characteristics, but they also differ in many others, and it is the differences that shape many of the important issues in their lives. You may find here both someone to help and someone who still needs help. The author writes as a Christian, and readers of every background and belief are welcome to take what helps.

Anyone who wants to help must also know that young people face many challenges, and that dealing with some of them may decide whether any other help works. Young people have needs like any other age group, and those needs, personal and shared, belong in any plan made for them. Once we understand their characteristics, their challenges and their needs, we can look for the best ways to meet those needs. Here it helps to understand the world of the 21st Century and what its challenges mean for people of every country, young people included. It also helps to understand each country's own situation. That situation explains why so many challenges have lasted so long, in spite of the abundant resources their countries are endowed with. This book speaks to several groups, wherever they are, brought together by one call: to understand young people better, so as to meet their needs well. They include young people themselves, concerned individuals, parents and the

nuclear and extended family, religious institutions, educational institutions, governments at every level and non-governmental organisations.

The bottom line is that they need everyone's help. Only with that help can we hope to build a greater country through them and see them take their rightful place in its affairs.

A note from the family. In 1977 the author was working on his PhD thesis in ecology at the University of Ibadan. Its title was *Ecosystem Studies in a Southern Guinea Savanna Vegetation in Nigeria*. He had been given land in the Lafiagi area of Kwara State, in North Central Nigeria, on which to plant trees for his study. Just as the results were within reach, bush burning on nearby land spread to his plot and destroyed all of it. After so much work, it was a devastating loss. His wife, Bola, whom he had married only a year before, saw the whole thing. He did not carry it alone. With the support and encouragement of those around him, he began again, finished the project and defended his thesis. He was awarded his PhD in 1980.

Your turn. Who showed up for you when you were young, or since? Whom could you show up for this month, and whom might you ask to show up for you? Choose one person, and decide what you will do.

END OF THE FREE SAMPLE

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