

LOOK MUM,
I CAN FLY!



Chi Dika

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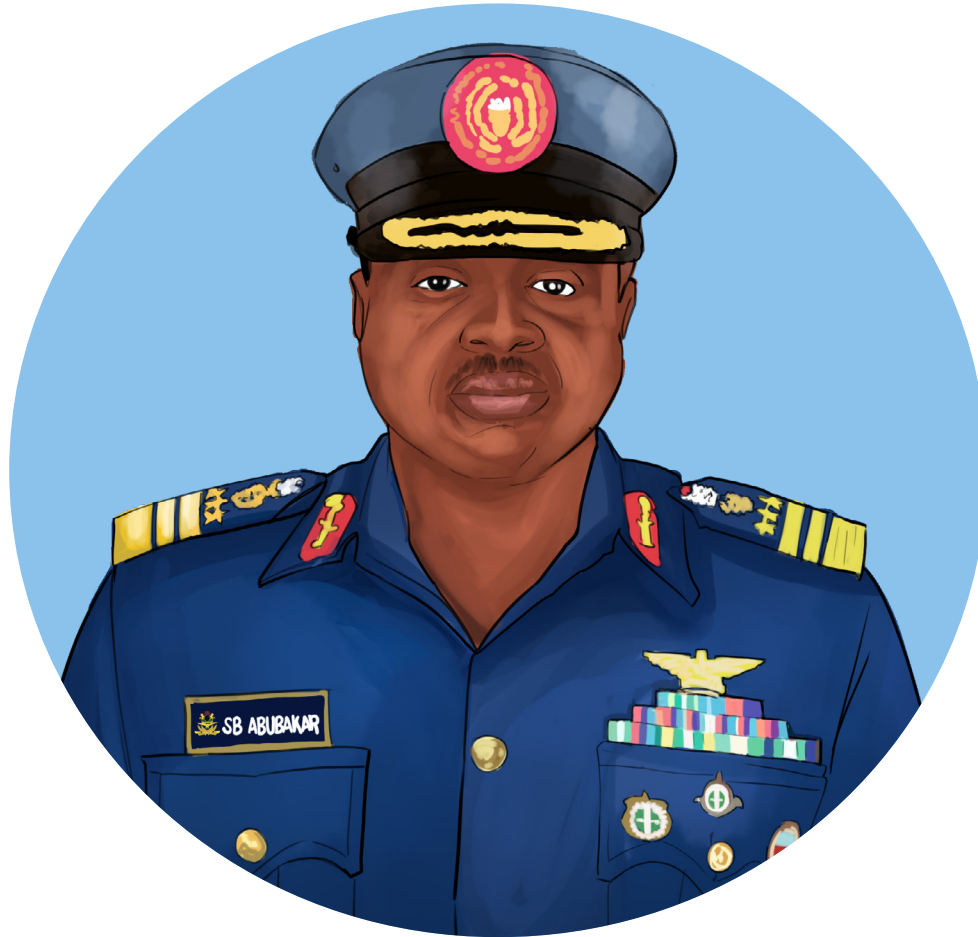
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This story is all about Ako and her dream. Ako dreamed that she would fly like a bird. Dad, Mum and all her friends would be proud of her, she thought. Ako could see her Mum's face beaming.



Ako is the only child of her parents. Every day, Dad and Mum remind her that she could achieve all her dreams if she worked hard. Mum always tells her that her dark hair was lovely and that her brown skin glowed just like the stars. Dad and Mum cherish Ako and she basks every day in the warmth of their love.



One day, as she walks alongside Mum, Ako hears a loud noise. The roaring noise seems to be coming from the skies.

Voooooooooooooooooom!

She stops to look up to see what it is. There is a moving object in the skies that looks like a big flying bird.

“Look, Mum, look!” she shouts in excitement. “Look at the big, big, bird up in the sky, it looks so small down here and moves so fast.”

Mum laughs and says, “That’s not a bird, Ako. Oh”. What is it then, Mum?”

Ako asks.



“It’s an aeroplane, my dear,” Mum replies.

Ako is amazed as her eyes sparkle! She had read of aeroplanes, but had never seen one before! Then Mum explained that it was not just any aeroplane, but a special kind of aeroplane used by the Nigerian Air Force, called a fighter jet. Ako’s eyes widen in amazement.

“Mum, can you buy me one fighter jet when we get to the market? Please...” asked Ako as the plane flies past, dims into a dot in the skies and gets swallowed up by the clouds.



Mum laughs, and Ako's eyes drop a little. Face down, Ako drops her arms in disappointment. Mum puts her right arm across Ako's shoulder and pats her gently. Mum explains that fighter jets are not sold in the market they shop from, and not everyone can get a fighter jet. She also mentions that fighter jets are not for everyday use.

"Those aeroplanes are very expensive! They are only used by the military to protect the nation and its citizens. But we could get you a toy jet!" Mum says.

"Oh wow! That sounds so cool, Mum. So, you mean that aeroplane that just passed by was protecting us?" exclaims Ako.

"Erm...yes. You could say so," replies Mum.



Vooooooooooooom! the sound roars again.

Ako and Mum look up again and, this time, they see not one, but three fighter jets flying together! Ako squeals in excitement, and she wonders why all three jets are flying together at the same time. Mum explains that the jets are having a drill.

“What’s a drill, Mum?” asks Ako.

“A drill is a training exercise. They are training to get better at flying and synchronise their movements,” comes her mother’s reply.

“What does synchronise mean?”

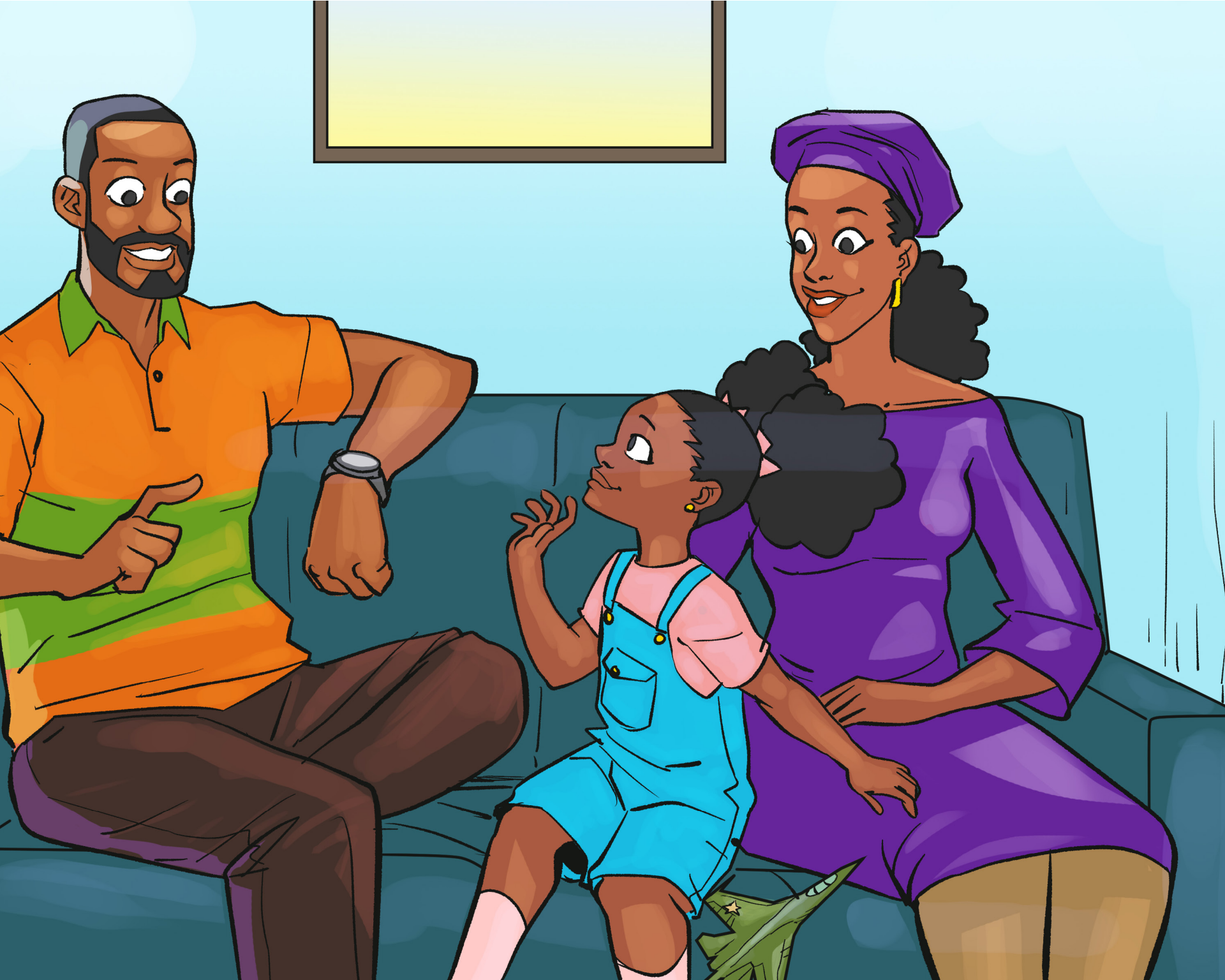
“It means to move together at the same time or
pace”



Then Ako has a great idea!

“I would love to fly that aeroplane someday. I would fly so high and help defend my country. I am going to be a hero and protect you, Dad and all my friends!”

“Oh, my dear, that’s a lovely dream!” replies Mum. “I’m sure Dad would love to hear all about it when we get home.”



Back home, Ako tells Dad all about the fighter jets and her dream to fly one someday.

After sharing her dream, Ako pauses for a second and asks Dad, “Can girls fly jets?”

“Yes, my dear,” said Dad. “Girls can fly jets and go as high as they want. Just like your aunt, Aro, who works with the Nigerian Air Force.”

“Aunty Aro works with the Air Force?”

“But, I have not seen her in the skies before,” Ako utters, as her parents laugh.

- So Ako can learn more, Dad has an idea “Let’s go and visit Aunty Arotile.” Ako and Mum both think it is a great idea.



The next day, Mum and Dad take her to visit with Aunty Aro. Ako and Aunty Aro are so happy to see each other that they hug so tightly.

“Ako dear, how are you? I’ve really missed you! Look how tall you have grown!”

Ako tiptoes and measures up with Aunty Aro. “I’m going to get to your shoulder very soon.”

Everyone laughs. Dad informs Aunty Aro that Ako had been eager to see her.

“Oh my! Your special, special aunty has a special, special meal prepared for everyone!” Aunty Aro exclaims as she pats Ako’s back.”



Over lunch, Mum tells Aunty Aro all about Ako's dream of flying a fighter jet. Aunty Aro is excited to hear about Ako's dream. She starts to explain all about the Nigerian Air Force and flying fighter jets!

First, Aunty Aro explains that jets, helicopters and transport planes are all different types of aircraft even though they all fly. All aircraft need a pilot to fly them. To become a pilot is no picnic! It takes years of study and a lot of resilience. Pilots have to be tough and have to read a lot too. Solving problems and being physically fit are all things that pilots working for the Nigerian Air Force have to do. The Nigerian Air Force is the best air force in the whole of Africa and tries to be among the very best in the world.



Ako was impressed by all she was learning. But it all seemed so tough to become a pilot of a fighter jet. She shrugs and wonders aloud, “But I’m not sure I’m tough enough to be a pilot!”

Aunty Aro pulls her chair next to Aro and looks her in the eye “Who do you think you were named after?” she asks.

Dad chimes in, “My dear Ako, you were named after your Aunt, Arotile.”

“But her name is Aunty Arotile, not Aunty Ako”, she responds.

“Well, that may be true. But remember your full name is Obinrin Akoko,” Mum adds.



“That means ‘first woman’ because your Aunt, Arotile is the first female combat helicopter pilot in the history of the Nigerian Air Force!” Dad says.

“Really?” Ako, looks again into Aunt Aro’s eyes, “You are the first female combat helicopter pilot in Nigeria?”

“Yes, Ako,” Aunt Aro replies with a smile.

Ako grins widely. Now she feels proud of her Aunt Aro and has gained back her enthusiasm.

“That is so cool” says Ako to Aunt Aro. “So you work and study hard, keep fit and protect people! Wow, you are a hero!”

“Oh, I am one of many other men and women who protect our dear country” Aunt Aro responds.

“I want to be a hero too when I grow up” Ako asserts with her fist pumping the air.



Soon it was time to leave Aunty Arotile's house and go back home. All the way home, Ako couldn't help but think about all her aunty had told her. She wanted nothing more than to grow up and be just like her amazing aunty.



Ako grew older holding on to her dream. She became interested in science and reading about how engines work and things fly. She read about the Wright brothers, the first men to fly. Everything seemed to be going to plan until Mum fell ill. She never recovered from the illness and passed away shortly after. This sad twist meant Mum would not see her fulfil her dream.

She missed Mum so much and it didn't help that Aunty Arotile was far away on a secret mission.



Because Mum was gone, Ako was always gloomy and sad. She made some new friends who had some different ideas about how to feel better. Her new friends offered her something- a substance that would lift her up and make her feel better. Ako was desperate and accepted the substance and put it in her bag. She was about to start something that would change her entire life – and not in a good way.

With the pills in her hands, she remembers the voice of Mum saying “Ako my dear, always be strong, work hard and hold fast to your dream. You can be anything you want to be. I want you to choose life!”



Ako takes out the rest of the pills from her bag and flushes them down the toilet. She also stops associating with these friends.

Dad tries his best to stand in and comfort her through the grief. He encourages her to never lower her aspirations but push harder to achieve her dream of being a pilot.

Time, they say, heals many wounds. Ako eventually feels a lot better and she starts to believe again that her dream is attainable.



Year after year, class after class and examination after examination, Ako keeps believing in her dream. One of those days after her final school examination, Dad has a surprise for her. He asks her to get dressed.

“Dad, are you sure I am going to like this surprise?” Ako asks.

“Oh yes. You know me and my knack for good surprises. Or have you forgotten?” Dad smiles as he winks at her at the same time.

It was a short drive to the gates of the Nigerian Air Force. Driving into the vast compound, the place was packed full with air men in uniforms. Ako was nervous. “Dad, what’s going on?” she murmurs.

“Oh, calm down. Nothing to worry about. Now, let’s get out of the car, shall we?”

Still uncertain about what was going on, she prods gently, “Can you at least tell me what the surprise is now, please?”



Dad points towards the left. To her amazement, it was Aunty Arotile standing tall, bold, and confident in her well-starched and smart looking uniform. Her blue beret only made her look taller than Ako could remember.

Ako couldn't hold back and runs straight into Aunty Aro's open arms. Aunty Aro hugs her tight bringing back fond memories.

"Ako, darling, long, long time! You're so big now!" says Aunty Aro joyfully.

"Yes, aunty. I'm now a few inches taller than you. You look so smart and heroic in your uniform."

Ako has a thousand and one questions to ask Aunty Arotile. "When did you get back?" Ako queries.



“As soon as I could,” Aunty Aro replies with a sparkle in her eyes.

It was a time of catching up and storytelling! In the middle of the chatter between aunt and niece, Ako turns and thanks Dad for the surprise. Dad laughs, “Oh, my dear that’s not all. I will let your aunt do the honours.”

There is real excitement in the air! Aunty Arotile asks her to close her eyes and open them at the count of three. One, two, three... Aunty Arotile hands Ako a sealed white envelope.



Ako grabs the envelope from Aunty Arotile and opens it even as her hands fidget. Inside is a form to enrol to become a pilot in the Nigerian Air Force! Ako screams in excitement, and hugs her dad and aunt. She couldn't stop expressing her thanks to both Dad and Aunty Aro.

“Now is the time to live your dream. Are you ready?” Aunty Aro quips in the midst of the excitement.

“Aunty, I was born ready for this. Trust me Aunty and Dad. I will do this for Mum,” she responds.

Aunty Aro smiles.

“Then let's go do this, shall we?”

All of her fears had melted away and was replaced by a determination to fly as high possible.



Ako gets into the Nigerian Air Force Programme and puts in her best. Working hard and applying all her effort, she graduates as the best student in her class. Dad and Aunty Aro are both proud of her achievements.



Ako soon gets some exciting news. She calls Dad to share.

“Guess what, Dad” Ako says, grinning from ear to ear.

“You’re coming home to stay the weekend. You know how I have missed you,” Dad responds.

“Awww. I have missed you too, Dad. But no, that’s not what I called to tell you.”

“What then, dear?”

Ako explains that she had just been briefed of her very first solo mission without a coach. Dad was so happy that he shed tears of joy over the telephone.



“Oh, Ako, I’m so proud of you. Your mum would be, too! I love you so much and I am happy that you didn’t give up on your dream. Thank you for not giving up and thank you for choosing life,” Dad says in between sobs.

Ako also gets teary eyed. “I love you too, Dad. Thank you for always supporting me,” she replies.

“Oh look at us, two little crybabies,” Dad says as they laugh the moment off. “Now, go fly that machine!”



The D-day arrives. Ako salutes her superiors and boards the jet, doing all the necessary checks before starting the engine. A voice blares through the radio connected to her headset.

“Captain Ako 1, this is your commander Brigadier Banjo. I just want to say you have been a great student and the nation is proud of you. Thank you for choosing to serve and protect the nation. Good luck on your first solo mission. Over”.

“Thank you sir, roger that. Over,” Ako softly screeches with joy. “Captain Ako 1, you are clear for take-off. I repeat, you are clear for take-off,” comes the voice again.

Ako taxis the jet along the runway and takes off into the skies, just as she had always dreamt. Up in the blue skies, she feels free and fulfilled. She gazes out the window and admires the beauty of the vast green fields below her. What an amazing sight, she thinks to herself. Who knows, there might be a little girl out there who sees this today.

LOOK
I
CAN
FLY



Looking above, she mutters under her breath “LOOK MUM, I CAN FLY”,

The End.




Quiz



1. What is Ako's full name?
2. What is the meaning of Ako's name?
3. Who is Aunty Arotile?
4. Who made the first aeroplane?
5. Did Ako give up on her dreams?
6. Did Ako act on the wrong advice on substance misuse?
7. Do NAF pilots wear uniforms?
8. What is the full meaning of NAF?




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