



Unquenchable Fire, Unequivocal Call: By Design and Determination: A Story of Uncommon Devotion to Country

Flora Trebi-Ollenu

Amerley Treb Books (Oct 10, 2013)

Hardcover \$49.95 (424pp)

978-1-894718-10-3

The daughter of a Ghanaian community leader delivers a heartfelt, touching biography.

Unquenchable Fire, Unequivocal Call is a daughter's intricate elegy for a community leader whose faith prompted him to work toward a better Ghana. Flora Trebi-Ollenu delivers a grand project, both a cultural and political history and a family epic, into which she embeds her father's impressive life story.

Trebi Ollenu, known affectionately as TK, was a man not celebrated far beyond the bounds of La, the Ghanaian town of his ancestry. Yet without his ingenuity and determination, the community itself would have been a much bleaker place.

Born during World War II, Trebi came of age in a period of great transition for Ghana. As the nation struggled to free itself from colonial rule, coup after coup threatened the fragility of its burgeoning independence. But Trebi demanded more for his community's future than a mere question mark. He saw in the flailing government structures of La evidence of its residents' hazy sense of self-worth, and he decided to rectify that deficit.

Trebi organized efforts to improve the town's sanitation system, which moved La, formerly the butt of local jokes, into the modern world. That tackled, he persuaded his contemporaries to help found LMK, a successful community organization that worked to establish a local bank and vocational school, as well as to make improvements to local health care. Trebi's visions were guided by the sense that empowered people would thrive and create a better, more communally responsible world, and the successes of LMK attest to the wisdom of that viewpoint. The author makes copious use of personal testimonials; these lead the reader to realize that Trebi's name is among the most lauded in La, thanks to the successes of LMK.

However, a greater portion of the book is devoted to Trebi's personal life than to his community endeavors. The author follows Trebi through his adolescence and details his entrance into college as a member of one of Ghana's earliest generations to benefit from higher education. Supported by his wife and growing family, Trebi's university years become the impetus for much of his later civic work. A constant in his life is his strong sense of faith, so the author also traces his leadership as a church elder. Most touching are the last portions of the book, in which the author situates Trebi amongst the ancestors who helped to guide his fate.

The book's arrangement is nonlinear, a choice which does not always seem intuitive. The author places Trebi's community work at the fore, perhaps in an attempt to attract the wider attention it merits. Still, it's the less superhuman Trebi—the father, husband, and son—who is celebrated in the book's more private sections and whose authenticity shines through. Readers will admire the organizer, but the extraordinary Ghanaian father, whose creativity and guidance inspired such love and admiration in his children, will earn greater appreciation. This book is a meticulous, heartfelt tribute that will edify readers about Ghanaian life, both on personal and political levels.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (June 25, 2013)

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