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Features**A jeweler's homecoming**

By Ijeoma Ogwuegbu
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Bola Allison had a job many people would kill for. During America's information technology boom, she was an IT consultant with a well-paid job. With a Bachelor's degree in International Affairs and a Masters in Global Technology, her educational skills were being used to the fullest. Such a good job meant a comfortable life and she should have been overjoyed. Yet none of these things gave her joy. That would only come years later, when she found herself starting a new career as a jeweler.

Discovering talent

"While I was an IT consultant, I hated what I was doing," says Allison, speaking to Saturday Sun recently. "I used to sit at my desk crying at work because I knew that I was not doing what I was meant to do. But I didn't know what it was I was supposed to be doing. I just didn't feel right where I was, so I couldn't be happy. I love Oprah Winfrey and I remember her saying once that there's one thing that you were made to do. I always knew I saw things differently from other people, so that while someone else might have been happy where I was, I knew it wasn't for me."

She was soon to discover her talent, though it was by sheer accident. It took the interest of her mother, Ibidun Allison of Amebo fame, to turn her in the right direction.

"In the Nineties, IT in America was beginning to slump and it wasn't as steady as it used to be. I was in Washington with my mother and she said she wanted to go to a shop somewhere so I had to drop her outside the shop. My mother has always loved jewelry, like most Nigerian women. When I came later to pick her, she wasn't outside where she was supposed to be so I had to go inside to look for her. There I met her sitting at the counter of this lady

**Bola Allison****Photo: Sun News Publishing**

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who was making and teaching people how to make jewelry. I was trying to hurry her so we could leave, but she kept telling me to sit down and look at what this instructor was doing. I said to her, “what is she doing? I can do that now.” I didn’t even know when the statement popped out of my mouth. Next thing I was asking the woman what one needed to make jewelry. I got some pointers from her, took home some of the stones and that was the beginning of my new life.”

Little training

Even though she still had to get some training, she believes most of what she knows about jewelry making is inborn.

“You find people with very little training doing something and they do it like they were born to do it. Even during my training, all my instructors always asked if I hadn’t already been trained in doing this. They couldn’t believe that all I was doing came naturally. I was just born to do this.”

Allison says this is why when she works on her pieces, nothing else matters.

“When I’m working, I don’t eat, I don’t answer phone calls, I don’t talk to anyone. I don’t even draw my pieces before working on them. It just comes to me naturally. I just let my imagination run. I don’t know where it comes from; I just know that it does. That is why I only make one-of-a-kind pieces. I don’t ever make two pieces that are the same and they are all hand-made.”

She says her works are now selling in many stores and art galleries abroad.

“I work with several precious and semi-precious stones, though the only metals I work with are gold and platinum. I name most of my works after friends and family. All my works are original pieces and I don’t copy anybody. There’s why there’s a guarantee on my work; your money back if you see the same piece on someone else. I want to educate the Nigerian market about precious stones. A lot of people just think of beads and corals when they think of precious stones but there’s a whole world of others out there.”

Target clientele

Allison says her work targets a special kind of woman.

“She is a very discerning woman who doesn’t want to have something because some other person has the same thing. She is one-of-a-kind and wants the same thing. That is why she is drawn to my work. I believe what sells them is the workmanship that is apparent to a discerning person. That and the finishing. I do this full time and I take it very seriously.”

Happy homecoming

Allison, who was away from the country for 25 years, returned last year September and says she is happy to be home. On the day of the interview, she is dressed in an Ankara skirt and blouse and looks and sounds like your typical educated Nigerian.

“Even though I spent 10 years in the United Kingdom and 15 in America, I was never really at home there. In America, I never unpacked fully. I was

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always thinking of home. Since I came in September, everybody has been asking me what possessed me to come home and it still surprises them when I say I'm here to stay. There is nowhere else like my country and I love being here. I've just been here five months and I feel like I was never away. As for the response to my work, it has been more than wonderful. It's been incredible. My works are selling and I'm happy."

Since coming back, she has done a photo-shoot for True Love magazine and worked with designer Tiffany Amber.

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