

Birthday bashing

Ten years after he turned 21, Eugene Yiga realises that growing older is about growing up

Ah, birthdays. They're the one time each year the world has to acknowledge our existence with text messages and free ice cream. No wonder I couldn't wait to turn 21. It would be a Friday. It would be the last day of term. It would be perfect.

Except it wasn't.

Sadly for me, I listened to a few too many people telling me what my birthday was 'supposed' to be like instead of deciding for myself. All I wanted was a simple night out with my friends, but they wanted something more. It was 'supposed' to be epic, lest I regret it for the rest of my life.

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How could I pick a venue not so 'la-di-dah' it would make anyone uncomfortable but not so dodgy that we risked getting our drinks spiked? How could I choose a menu broad enough to cater for everyone's tastes but affordable enough not to starve my wallet? And how could I create a guest list intimate enough to avoid neglecting any individual person but diverse enough so nobody would feel left out? It was turning

into a diplomatic nightmare worse than the seating arrangements at the UN.

In the end, my birthday bashed. Why? Because nothing measured up. Having such lofty ideals meant that whatever little thing didn't fit into the grand plan detracted from the fun. I couldn't appreciate all the well wishes or all the free drinks because they didn't matter. Instead, I was fixated on the slow service at the restaurant and the surprising lack of a dance floor after that. I lost the plot.

The experience taught me three things. First, with unrealistic expectations, disappointment comes standard. Second, too much sushi means no room for cheesecake. Third, and most important, listening to other people isn't always smart. For my friends, turning 21 was about going out, getting drunk, and waking up to live yet another year as exactly the same person. But that just wasn't me.

For me, birthdays have always meant something more. This was the perfect time to look back at my life and appreciate how far I'd come. It was the perfect time to acknowledge who I was and be grateful for all the experiences that had come to define me. It was about looking forward to life as an adult, not stressing over a stupid party theme.

In any case, my life went on. It was great to wake up knowing I'd be starting a new chapter in my life. It was also great to decide that I wouldn't let other people influence me like that anymore. I'd listen to what they had to say, but would always make up my own mind.

Life's too short to spend pleasing people who think they know you and who are always telling you what you're 'supposed' to do or who you're 'supposed' to be. As grown-ups, we should know better. 