

As A Child - I was born in Ibadan, in south-west Nigeria. I remember it as a city of dusty red roads, of bungaloes buried under flowers, of botanical gardens. When I was five my father got a "a good job" in the capital city of Lagos. A city of polo clubs and swimming pools and slums. We went to live behind the high walls of a mansion in a quiet part of the city, and left our extended family behind. This is where my love affair with books and stories began, locked behind the great iron gates of the lonely house. Throughout my childhood I wanted firstly and desperately to be a Boy, then an Adventurer, and lastly, An Author. Two of these were impossible (I was told) and one was dangerous. Forget it. So I carried on reading instead. I read Enid Blyton books and it sounded fun. At 10 years old, after a campaign of cajoling and persuading, my parent agreed to send me to boarding school in England. And that was, effectively, the end of my childhood.

As an adult

As soon as I could, I gave up all subjects but storybooks and went off to study literature. I wrote 10,000 words one year to get over a lost love and got into Oxford instead. But the writing I had to do there was so dry that I left. I decided to go Adventuring instead. I lived and travelled in England and France, Morocco and Germany and Spain, sleeping like a nomad on beaches and mountainsides. I sang for my supper, painted portraits, weeded gardens, worked as an artist's model and lived in a round mud hut in the wild wet woods of Wales. One day, pregnant with my first son, I told a story to some bored children at a festival and that's when my proper job found me! I haven't stopped telling stories since.

As an artist

I got through the trials and tribulations of life by escaping into books and making up stories in my head. My journal stayed with me through all my adventures, crammed with poetry and reflections and questions. I told stories for a living (because I had been told it was impossible to be An Author - and I had believed them). Until one winter in Wales...too ill to get up and go out and tell stories. Too ill to go home to my father-land. I found myself in the circumstances in which I write best (alone and bored and empty) and I wrote about what I was missing... I wrote Anna Hibiscus.

Things you didn't know about Atinuke

My favourite chocolate is peppermint and vanilla flavour.

I love wearing Big Boots and stomping about the place.

My favourite place to live would be...right on the beach.

I was old before I met the love of my life (sometimes you have to wait a long time for your fairy tale dreams to come true).

I live in my dream house. A wooden house my husband built...which isn't finished yet!

I live on a mountain called Angel Mountain, my favourite place to be.

If I could have/do anything it would be to have a world that works together for the good of the whole planet.

I love to knit socks.

If in doubt...I go to bed, it's the best place to hole up.

I love to whirl like Rumi.