a series by Seema Marwaha

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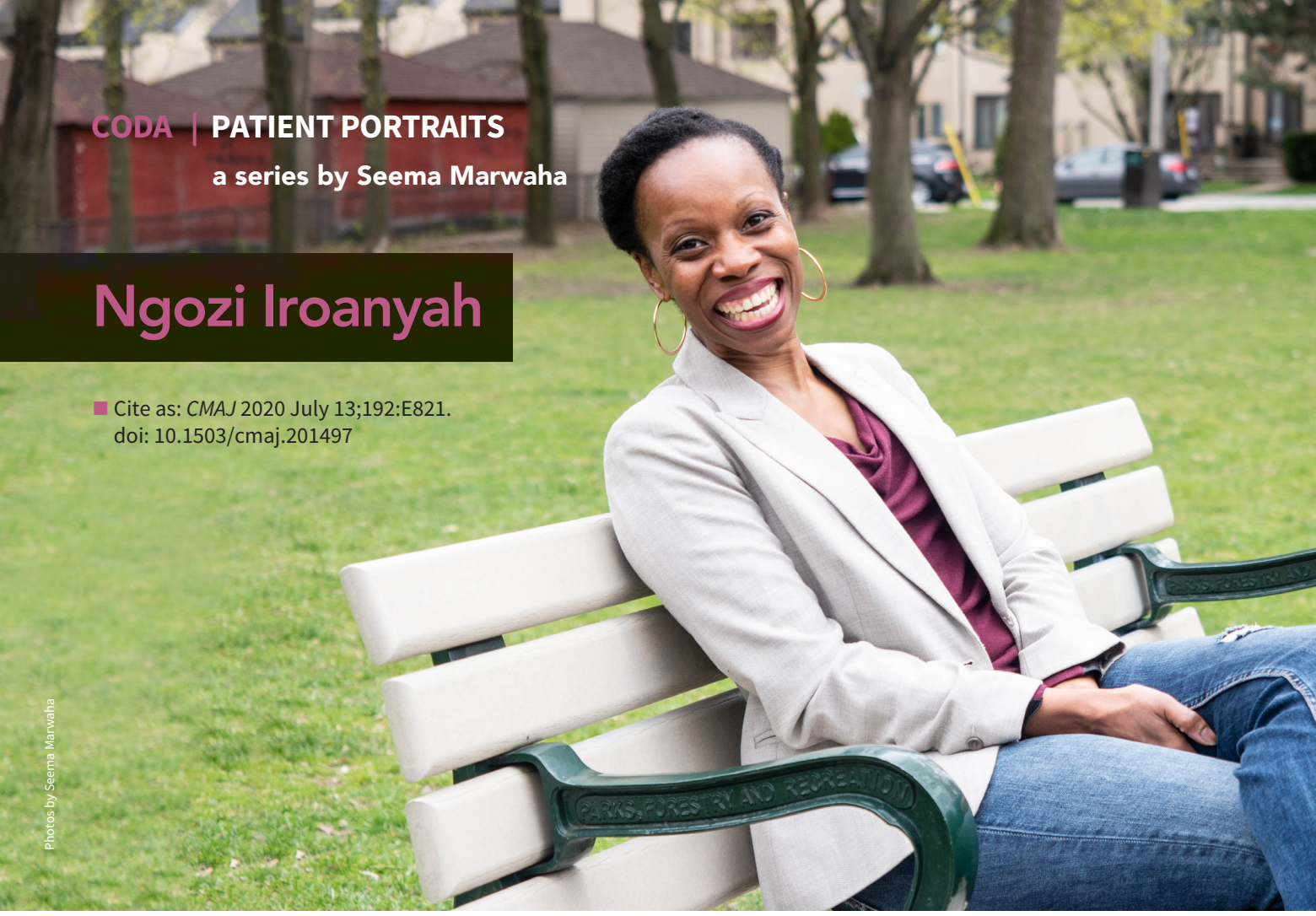

Photos by Seema Marwaha

I've always been Daddy's little girl. I'll never forget the day he was diagnosed with dementia. It was one of the saddest days of my life.

An occupational therapist came to our home to do an assessment. He told my father he had dementia. My father looked up and replied, "Am I ever going to get better?" The therapist said, "No, unfortunately you are not." My dad lowered his eyes and got really quiet and said, "Oh, I see." And then he looked up at me, his eyes were kind of glassy. He asked again, "Am I ever going to get better?" And I looked at him, I took his hand and I said, "No Daddy you are not." He quietly said, "Oh, I see."

It was a defining moment for me because, at that moment, I became the parent and he became the child in our relationship.

I felt broken for him.

My father had a very colourful life. He was married 3 times to women much younger than him. He left Nigeria when he was 19. He went to study in England — he became a very accomplished scholar, getting his PhD in economics and philosophy. This was a pretty admirable feat for a boy from the village in colonial Nigeria as England was very racist in the 1960s. He moved to Canada in the 1970s.

Growing up, Daddy was my best friend. I could tell him anything. We talked, we laughed, we had the same sort of humour. We had the same personalities: outgoing, very determined, stubborn.

Dementia bleeds into a person's life and takes over. You're never really prepared, but having worked in health care, I knew what to look for emotionally, mentally, physically, financially, materially and health wise.

I speak for my father. I communicate his needs and routine. I give providers that context of how they need to treat my dad in the health care system. I hope it makes their job easier and makes my dad's care more seamless.

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