

## TRIBUTE TO MRS GLADYS SUMNER BY EDWARD W. FASHOLE-LUKE II (7727) FCI Arb.



Mrs Gladys Sumner was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1930 in what was then called Bathurst in the Gambia. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Fourah Bay College, which was then part of the world famous university of Durham. She then went on to do a post graduate Degree in Education at Harvard University.

I can vividly recall the first day I met her when she gracefully glided into my Form 2 classroom at the Sierra Leone Grammar School in 1973. She had come to take a class in Latin. She was an amazingly beautiful lady. I sat in class with a sense of wonder looking at this spectacular teacher of mine. I made up my mind that I was going to make her proud of me. She opened a Latin text book and asked us to recite *Amo, Amas, Amat, amamus amatis Amant*. That was fun because my parents, who had studied classics had made us study Latin from the age of five.

She was a delightful teacher. She demanded the best from us. She also taught me English, and her subjects were my favourite subjects in school. She was always so immaculately dressed. She was so enchantingly lovely. She had the uncanny ability of stimulating our young minds with anecdotes that made it fun for us to study. I always looked forward to her classes. I think I can safely say Dr Abiodun Williams and I were her favourite students at the Grammar School. I was always first in her class. I recall a time when I was rather naughty in school and she asked to see me after class. She said to me, "Edward, you come from a very good family and I have heard that you are about to be suspended from school for skipping classes. I

expect so much better from you”. I closed my eyes and started crying. She gave me a very motherly hug after I told her that I would never do that again. She said that she believed in me and that God had great things in store for my future and that I should not jeopardize that. I said that ‘I will never do that again Mrs Sumner’ and I never did. She never spanked me.

She taught me Latin in Forms 2, 3 and 4. She taught me English in Forms 2,3,4, and 5. She was an excellent teacher. She was warm, friendly and very motherly. She reminded me so very much of my dear mother. She was by far my favourite teacher at the Grammar School. I recall the times when I won the prizes in English and Latin, at the prize giving ceremonies she would always be clapping so very heartiully for me.

When I graduated from Fourah Bay College, I came to London to study law as a virtually impoverished student. Aunty Gladys was then living in London, as her dear husband, Victor was the then High Commissioner to her Majesty’s Court of St James. When she was there, she so very kindly and graciously took me under her wing as a law student at the University of London. She knew I enjoyed the finer things of life, in spite of my precarious circumstances. She would invite me to 3 Ingram Avenue to take luncheons after my long services at St Paul’s Cathedral. It was there, that I came to appreciate her gastronomical talents as a gourmet chef. I recall many a time taking luncheon at their home in Hampstead and the fine wines and delectable company at the exquisite dining table. Chatting with Uncle Victor, the famous Queens doctor, Mr. Christopher B. Lynch and a host of important people from whom I learnt a considerable amount from. It was at those times, with her inestimable charm, that I was told by her not to give up and to keep focused on my studies and that, I too could become successful. It was then, that the lovely Havana cigars would come out together with delectable port and cognac to wash down the fine cuisine that we had enjoyed immensely. I had, of course as a naughty boy started smoking cigars,

or should I say, stealing my dad's cigars when I was 9 years old living in Michigan.

Let me go back and say, Mrs. Sumner then became Aunty Gladys or Glad, as she affectionately became to many of us. She never judged me in spite of the fact that I had been a rather naughty boy in school. She always encouraged me and made me feel that I could achieve anything I wanted to if I believed in God and worked hard.

I feel that she was indispensable to the foundation of English Language and its grammar which she taught so effectively at the Grammar School. She helped me when so many people turned their backs on me in England as a law student. She loved her family and always spoke in very glowing terms of them. Her favourite perfume was Joy by Jean Patau which I promised I would get her when I became a successful lawyer. She helped me in very tight situations as a student in London.

I got to know her even better when she stayed together with my mum, my brother and her niece Claudette in Palmers Green after uncle Victor's time as High Commissioner came to an end. We had fun times together. She always reminded me of my dear mother. She was caring and loving as well as extremely generous.

Over the years, I stayed in regular contact with her and for over 30 years called her on her birthday. I have never forgotten her many acts of kindness to me. On her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday I asked her what she wanted and she "don't worry, nothing". I sent her a bottle of her favourite Joy perfume. She always smelt nice and she was so appreciative. We talked about lovely choral and organ music from the great Cathedrals. She was so very proud that her Grand Son Ben was a chorister at the Washington National Cathedral which is my favourite Cathedral in the USA. She came to St Paul's Cathedral with me a few times and always talked of the extraordinary wonderful wedding service of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spenser at St Paul's Cathedral which she had attended there.. I had the pleasure of introducing her to my

good friend, Dr Christopher Dearnley, then Organist and Director of St Paul's Cathedral who had been the Organist at the Grand Royal Wedding and had been in charge of the extraordinary music at the Royal wedding there.

I will miss you so very much Aunt Glad, you were like a mum to me. I was so sad that I was not able to speak to you on your 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. I tried so very hard to call you but Lucyann tells me that's the day you were admitted into hospital. We shared many stories and I could talk to her about anything. She was truly a confidant of mine. This was especially after my dear mum went to heaven in 1994. I could go on and on.

Now, to conclude, I think it is fitting that I quote from the tribute given to my dear mother by my father's absolutely brilliant Professor at Durham University, the Rev Professor Charles E.B. Cranfield, whom my Dad considered as the most brilliant man he had ever met and who was god father to my brother Polycarp who said inter alia the following of my mother ' She was a really good woman, a sincere and devout Christian, who has set a fine example of a Christian life. It has been a privilege to have known her ,and we thank GOD for her life and for everything that He has given to us through her, and we rejoice that she is safe with the Lord Jesus Christ, whom she so faithfully sought to serve.' I believe those sentiments aptly apply to my dear aunty Glad. I pray and know that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is looking after you. Please say hi to my dear mum. I truly love you and you were very very special to me. I think you would approve of me ending by saying ***Pax et Caritas Christi.***

May GOD Bless us all in JESUS Name. To Lucyann and Lenny, I know what its like to lose a mother. I still miss my dearest mother so very much. I pray that the comfort of the Holy Spirit will surround you with His love and peace. Remember she is in the most wonderful place and we are going to join her there soon as JESUS IS coming back soon.