

## **Tribute to Samuel Joseph Ebenezer Metzger**

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Several journalists had always wanted to sit with Sam Metzger in the twilight of his life to record his memoirs for posterity. One of them, Winston Ojukutu-Macauley was so fascinated by the man's journalistic prowess, which made him one of the greatest journalists of his time, which he volunteered to sponsor a prize in his honour in the 2009 Annual IMC Media Awards. When Winston broached the suggestion about naming an award after Sam, which proposition was readily accepted by the Board of the IMC, I decided to visit him (Sam) at his Kissy Road residence to have some insight into his career that will enable me do justice to my introduction of him to the audience during the ceremony.

Apart from being a colleague, Sam was also a blood relation, having hailed from the Luke-Metzger family. During that visit in 2009, after much brain-storming between us on what the prize should be called, we settled for "Sam Metzger prize for political reporting". He told me that throughout his journalism career, he reported on everything under the sun, but his "greatest passion in his reportage was politics". I hope that with or without the support of a sponsor, the IMC will continue to include this prize in its list of prizes at the Annual IMC awards.

During that visit, Sam gave me as much information as he could and promised to write his autobiography before his death. I told him I would send him a student to help him put it together, but since time and tide wait for no man, we missed the golden opportunity to have a comprehensive account of his life and times, for we never got on to it.

However, from the little I got from him during that visit and from what he himself was able to scribble before his death and which he asked our cousin, Ronnie to hand over to me, I have been able to develop this tribute.

Samuel Joseph Eustace Metzger was born in Nyakrom, Ghana on July 21, 1927 to Dr. Eustace Alade Luke-Metzger of Freetown and Elizabeth Abaya Eduah from Ghana. Having lost his father at the tender age of 7, he was brought up in Freetown by his paternal uncle, a master printer and virtually had to work his way through school.

He obtained his primary education from the Freetown Secondary School for Girls (Kindergarten Section at the time when his aunt Hannah Benka – Coker – nee Luke was Principal of the School); Ebenezer Amalgamated School and Holy Trinity School in Freetown respectively. He then proceeded to the Sierra Leone Grammar School, after which his mother who was living in the then Gold Coast got him into St. Augustine College in Cape Coast to pursue his tertiary education. Many people will remember him as a regular participant among past pupils in the Annual Thanksgiving Services and march past of both the Freetown Secondary School for Girls and the Sierra Leone Grammar School until recent years when his health started to deteriorate. This show of fidelity to his alma maters speaks volumes of his steadfastness and devotion to causes in which he believed.

At a very early age, Sam was fascinated by two great men in Sierra Leone's political history- the late I.T.A. Wallace Johnson who authored the article "Has the African a God?" that nearly sent him to jail; and the Rev, E.N Jones, otherwise known as Lamina Sankoh, the Anglican priest who became famous for his political perorations rather than his ecclesiastical discourse.

Sam was also full of admiration for Dr Nmandi Azikwe, then editor of the Morning Post in Accra, Ghana where Wallace Johnson was a celebrated columnist because of his very fiery scribbles.

After his first year at St. Augustine's College, Sam's mother, a business woman, who was sponsoring his tertiary education in Ghana became ill and could no longer afford to pay his son's fees. He therefore joined the Morning Post as a reporter. When the editor, Nnamdi Azikwe left for Nigeria in 1949, he took Sam with him to work in his newly found newspaper People's Voice. Sam went through the ranks as reporter, sub-editor and assistant editor and by 1953; he had become editor of the newspaper.

To prepare himself well for his chosen career, Sam entered the Extra-Mural Department of Ibadan University College in 1952 and took courses in Journalism and economics.

At the end of 1953, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe launched the West African Pilot and his association with Sam which had by then developed to a point where he was regarded as Azikwe's adopted son, landed him a job at the Pilot as editor. The West African Pilot soon became one of the many newspapers that attracted budding journalists from the West African Diaspora and elsewhere and became known as the Bible of West Africa.

Sam returned to Sierra Leone in 1955 and was appointed Assistant Editor (Production) at the Sierra Leone Daily Mail, with Cecil King as editor. The Daily Mail was in those days one of the most renowned newspapers in the West African sub-region. In 1956, he was lured to the African Vanguard in Freetown to serve as Production Manager and was appointed Managing Editor in 1960.

Sam recalled with relish his invitation by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe to witness the Nigerian independence celebrations in October, 1960. He mused: "On arrival in Lagos, I learnt to my greatest surprise that I had been singularly chosen to be Guest of Honour and to propose the toast to Dr. Azikwe at the very first official banquet to celebrate his assumption to office as Governor General. That came as a real surprise because since 1955, I had been in Freetown."

Back from the independence celebrations in December 1960, Sam discovered that his position as Managing Editor of the African Vanguard had been filled and therefore returned to Nigeria. In his own words, he "was immediately catapulted into society, where he mingled with the crème de la crème as Deputy Editor of the giant Daily Express- a merger of the Thompson Group in London and some Nigerian press barons". Sam described this appointment as the most exciting experience of his career. He summed it up in these words – "it gave me an excellent opportunity to practice journalism per excellence". His work at the Daily Express must have caught the eyes of the Nigerian government, for two years later, when the government embarked on the search for an editor without sectional or regional bias to guide the fortunes of the newspaper, a man with drive, personality and initiative, the choice fell on Sam Metzger.

On the Daily Express, Sam's popularity was meteoric, particularly his coverage of the Congo crisis that climaxed in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. It was Africa's first big crisis and Sam rose up to the challenge, enhancing the respect and political clout of Nigeria.

As Editor of the Daily Express, Sam became a pace setter. Among other things, he helped prepare the Nigerian public for the leadership role that the country was destined to play, particularly the hosting of the Lagos Summit that became the prelude to the Addis Ababa summit which heralded the birth of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) now African Union. Sam recalled " The role that I personally played to attract the late Emperor Haile Selassie to the Lagos Summit at a time when his wife (the Empress) was on her death bed, is something that I should not talk about, less you think I am being pompous. Suffice it to say that the Empress died and the Emperor had to be summoned back from Lagos to Addis Ababa. The Lagos summit was a great success"

He added that before leaving Lagos at the end of the summit, the then revered President Houphouët Boigny of the Ivory Coast paid him a special visit at the Daily

Times.” With a rascally smile, Sam added, “he gave me a special assignment that I will not tell you about”.

He also recalled with pride a special invitation from Emperor Haille Selassie to attend the inauguration of the OAU in Ethiopia and of his coverage of the event, which he published not only in the Daily Times but also in the reputable West Africa magazine which was published in London and the Daily Graphic of Ghana. He added, “My sojourn in Nigeria where I was best known and respected more than in Sierra Leone was very fascinating and rewarding.”

He also did consultancy work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service and was a regular freelance broadcaster for radio and television in Nigeria.

Sierra Leone, having gained independence in 1961, Sam Metzger decided to return home in 1964 to contribute to the development of his native land. He was appointed Managing Editor of Unity Press, the newspaper of the then ruling SLPP, which position he held until 1967, when the SLPP lost the election to the All People’s Congress. He founded a new newspaper The Nation and in his own words “used the paper to call attention to the ills of society, in particular the shady deals of the SLPP in trying to deprive the APC from assuming power as the legitimate government after winning the 1967 elections, the call by Albert Margai for the One Party system of government and rampant corruption of state functionaries”. Not even his very close relations, who were in governance at the time, were spared his scathing exposes, resulting in bad blood between himself and a section of his family.

After brief incarceration at the Pademba Road prison during the military interregnum for his incisive editorials, he was prevailed upon by his family to “quit” the profession. But not Sam, for whom journalism was a passion. He went back to Nigeria, but failed to get the recognition accorded him in his heyday in that country and decided to return home.

Sam recalled how Siaka Stevens wooed him to take on the editor-ship of his party’s newspaper, “We Yone”, which he originally refused as he did not believe in the One Party philosophy that Stevens was trying to propagate. He had vehemently opposed it when it was first mooted by Albert Margai and had written many articles lambasting Margai for this move. However, upon realization that One Partyism was a crusade that was being taken up by many countries in Africa, he threw in the towel and took up the leadership of We Yone as editor-in chief, with zest. He developed a personal relationship with Stevens and even helped to promote what many have come to regard as Siaka’s excesses. Even after the exit of Stevens, he continued to serve the party faithfully until the advent of the NPRC when party politics was banned.

Sam Metzger will be remembered among the journalism fraternity for the role he played as a founder member of SLAJ, which he served twice as President. In those days when there was no school of journalism in the country, Sam Metzger trained

very many journalists, who drank deep from his rich reservoir of knowledge and skills in all aspects of the profession.

When the government recruited Ken Smiley of the BBC to train Sierra Leonean journalists in Freetown in the 1980s, Sam Metzger was appointed to work with him as co-trainer for journalists in the print media under the auspices of the Extra Mural Department at Fourah Bay College.

He served as Chairman, Board of Directors of the Sierra Leone Daily Mail and member of the Film Censorship Board of Sierra Leone for several years. He was also a Commissioner of the Independent Media Commission in its inception in 2001 until 2007 when he retired. He was honoured with the national insignia of Order of the Rokel in April 2011 by President Ernest Bai Koroma during Sierra Leone's 50th anniversary celebrations, a fitting and timely tribute to his life and work. He is survived by his son Edward, grand-daughter Nicola and several relations, friends and members of the journalism fraternity.

**MAY SAM METZGER'S SOUL REST IN PERPECTUAL PEACE!!**