

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE ARNOLD BENJAMIN (6641)
THE 'GATEKEEPER' OF 16 SOLDIER STREET IS NO MORE
BY JACOB BAMIE PALMER (BROTHER IN LAW)



Today we gather here to say a final goodbye to Arnold Jenner Benjamin and I stand here with a heavy heart to give this tribute to someone who was not only a brother-in law by marriage but was also a brother in every respect of the word. When Arnold passed away, the only thing I thought of and I said to myself was that 'the gatekeeper' of 16 Soldier street is no more!

Arnold had many interests, but his home and family life always came first. His love for his siblings and the rest of his family was extraordinary. He was the gatekeeper of their close knit family. He bore no ill feelings towards anyone, least of which his immediate family. He was a good man, a compassionate guy, a man of character, a man who loved deeply and was loved in return. As true son of Soja Tong you could tell that Arnold had a proper upbringing which inculcated in him strong morals and principles that he lived by daily. He was one of the least materialistic people I've ever met. He was always happy with what he already had, and knew it was right for him. His generosity had no limit especially where his sisters and closed family members are concerned. He would give all that he had to any of his close family members when they are in need. Indeed the 'gatekeeper' of 16 Soldier Street in Freetown is no more.

Arnold was a true gentleman. For him the word 'gentleman' was not just a cliché. He lived it and he exemplified it. He was a man of few words but of excellent character and great intelligence. He was an articulate and interesting man to talk to, but more importantly, he was someone who would really listen. When I visited with him in his last few days with us I came back thinking; He must be getting better because he was still sharp, smart and articulate even when plagued by illness. His love for his niece and nephews never waned, even when his health was failing. I saw that in him everyday day and every time I spoke to him. He would always have kind and encouraging words to say about his immediate family. He touched all of our lives in different ways but one thing was common, his humility and candor was always on display. Yes he was the 'gatekeeper' of his family.

Arnold was a wonderful storyteller; His anecdotes about his typical Creole upbringing in Freetown are ones I would always cherish. He never deviated from the norms and strict orderliness of his upbringing. He would recall the smallest details of a tale with great clarity and then weave them into the story, so you felt like you were actually there. Despite his illness, Arnold never complained about the discomfort he was in, his resilience was a rare quality in

anybody going through what he went through. Yet he took everything in stride and his faith never waned. He was a strong gatekeeper.

He was the gatekeeper of the family

He was the gatekeeper of the family's history

He was the gatekeeper of the family's traditions and customs

He was the gatekeeper of the family's bibliography

He was the stern gatekeeper who would quell all fights and spats among his siblings

He was the fierce gatekeeper feared by those who braved those gates at 16 soldier street

Yes, the gatekeeper of 16 Soldier Street is no more... but in our hearts we will always remember him.

My brother, we couldn't get to take you on a tour of New York City. Something you had always dreamed of. You could not wait for us to throw the surprise 60th birthday party for you because you left too soon. But we are consoled. Indeed we are. Because we know you are with a better tour guide now and you are in a place that is wonderfully bright and more beautiful than the Big Apple. You could not celebrate your 60th birthday with us but we know you will be celebrating with those who have gone before you and with the Angels and arch angels in heaven. What a celebration that would be.

We all have many happy memories of Arnold and these we must hold dear in our hearts and cherish them, as he cherished us. Because "Love is the only thing that we can carry with us when we go, and it makes the end so easy."

Epitaph on a Friend

An honest man here lies at rest,

The friend of man, the friend of truth,

The friend of age, and guide of youth:

Few hearts like his, with virtue warmed,

Few heads with knowledge so informed;

If there's another world, he lives in bliss;

If there is none, he made the best of this.

- Robert Burns

Arnold. You have fought the good fight, you have finished the race and you have kept the faith.

Now God shall wipe away tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death.

May your gentle soul, rest in perfect peace.