

REMEMBRANCE

HON. ROGER HAROLD CLIFFORD CLARKE, CD, MP

BY

**THE MOST HON. P. J. PATTERSON, ON, OCC, PC, QC
FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA**

AT

**SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING
ST. GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH
SAVANNA-LA-MAR, WESTMORELAND**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2014
10.30 A.M.**

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**We strive to commit each one for memory
To each is attached a glimpse of his face
To each a revelation a key to his infinity.
A recitation of his several names is a single
shining chain binding him to us.
Round perfect is the moon's face
we stand in the circle of light that is him.**

Roger Harold Clifford Clarke proved at his death to have been even larger than in life.

The strong of irreparable loss to Jamaica and massive outpouring of genuine admiration reflect a crossing of the divide of politics, of social class, of colour and creed.

The widespread recognition and admiration of the worth and work of this gentle giant springs from a narrative which spans the bridges of a humble beginning; the steadfast pursuit of acquiring knowledge in his early passage from boyhood rule; an industrious and diligent application in the theatre of work engagements; to the arena of public service for the building of the nation and the betterment of its people.

Roger Clarke was not a son of the gentry. His first childhood steps were not far from here, where two years before, the eruption of workers at Frome and the persistent conflicts between the Barons of the estate and those who laboured in the cane fields fashioned the social environment in which he grew.

THE BOYHOOD YEARS

Under the tutelage of Teacher Edgar Morle at Williamsfield Elementary School, his classmates remember him as a very attentive, focused, well-behaved and brilliant student.

Having passed the Second Year Jamaica Local, he entered Manning's High School. He rode his bicycle from his home at Glen Islay to school in Savanna-la-Mar (a distance of over ten miles of partly hilly terrain) and back home after school. He was hardly ever late.

No wonder he developed a respect for time – he was always accessible and one who addressed the concerns of his constituents and agents of Sectoral interests promptly.

His contemporaries remember him as a slim and trim student (Bolt-like in frame), a jovial individual who displayed respect and kindness to all.

Even though he was quiet, steady and focused, he was given to pranks. On more than one occasion, he was at the receiving end of the rod of that legendary Headmaster, L. A. Prescod.

What is not so well known, is that he represented Manning's at cricket. I have searched long and hard to find something about his batting record. I have not been successful. However, I am reliably informed that on the day of a match, his cousin came with an urgent message from his mother. When he was told that Roger had just gone out to bat, he said, "I can wait. He will soon be back."

BORN TO BE A FARMER

Having helped as a young child his Parents and Grandparents on their farm in Williamsfield, which produced a variety of Root Crops and Vegetables, his deep interest in agriculture was evident from then.

After leaving Manning's School, his Uncle William Jenoure, himself a huge Sugar-cane Planter arranged his first job as an overseer of a Sugar Plantation owned by Hugh Fraser. He did an excellent job there and his talents were so quickly recognized that he was immediately recruited for Appleton Estate.

It was there I first met Roger Clarke when serving my own political apprenticeship as a Political Organizer in St. Elizabeth.

Roger Clarke was the eager beaver in North East St. Elizabeth, dashing from meeting to meeting in his Ford Falcon – always in high platform demand – full of humour and always giving stories to compel attention – in language they could understand but mostly inappropriate for church play.

Whenever Sonia traveled with him, the glint in his eyes betrayed the feelings of affection; he was always in a rush to leave after his final platform engagement. To the very end she stood beside him as he gasped his last breath.

To Sonia, the children and all members of the bereaved family, I quote from a poem by C. Day Lewis:

*“Perhaps it is roughly
Saying what God alone would perfectly show –
How childhood begins with walking away
And love is proved in the letting go.”*

His work at the grass roots level, from the trenches and through the ranks of the Party, prepared him fully for the invaluable contribution he was subsequently to make all over the island in Party Organization.

He treated everyone with respect and never committed the cardinal sin to talk down to the country man or patronize poor urban folk.

Moving up the ladder by his own skills and enterprise to the position of Farm Manager at Appleton Estate, Roger Clarke was quickly identified as a man who treated people well and wanted the best for them as for himself.

Believing in farming and committed to expanding opportunities for people, he invested in the industry, putting his experience to greater use and securing his financial independence. At the time of his passing, he was the largest cane producer in St. Elizabeth, growing a myriad of legitimate crops on his own farm.

THE POLITICIAN

He was the only caller who would make Wilmot Perkins stumble and stutter on air.

Who can forget his conversation with Perkins when a certain lady called his Radio Talk Show Host to berate Roger and question whether his appointment as Minister of Agriculture was fitting

In true Roger Clarke fashion, he called Mutty immediately after, and asked for a word of prayer for the lady.

He then went on to explain that it was someone he knew, but who unfortunately had gone astray and taken up one of the oldest vocations known to women. He had declined her advances and reprimanded her firmly and she had not taken kindly to his censure. The lady never troubled him again.

He did not conceal his passion to enjoy the pleasures of life, always eager to share the blessings of hard honest work with his family and friends.

It was in Siloah he fashioned a discerning the taste for the fermented and distilled product of the factory – including how to sample and handle copious quantities of a rum bearing the name of the derriere of the John Crow.

Within that gargantuan frame, there was barely hidden a treasure trove of kindness of goodness of boldness.

His ebullient displays would at times be a cover to disguise the beat of an emollient heart within.

One will hear stories like that of the small farmer who, having saved a certain amount of money, sent him a message about wanting to purchase a cow. In short order the transaction was complete and the delighted farmer obtained a heifer – two animals for the single sum of money he had available.

He leaves a legacy of goodwill, decency, hard work and major accomplishments which the passage of time should not erase.

The celebration of Roger Clarke's life is a reminder that the time has come for us to recognize that national service takes many forms. Imperfection is a feature of all human life – it is not confined to those who render political service.

It is my fervent hope that in our reflection on the life of this Jamaican icon, we can begin to change our attitude to political engagement. He moulded a template for practitioners in the art of politics. A fitting measure demands that we cease to vilify all our political leaders, lump them together as a class or gang inimical to the national well-being and wait until they die to praise them for their national contribution. We must cease to deliberately ignore the political dimension of their service and even question their motives for political activism.

Roger Clarke firmly rejected the notion that service to the nation is incompatible with fierce loyalty to a Party in whose principles he believed.

He was a formidable competitor, who enjoyed the art of a vigorous political duel – but without rancour and devoid of malice. He was articulate, witty, a master of political repartee, as both his Party colleagues and those on the other side can confirm.

He was as comfortable with the yam farmer as he was with the Heads of Corporations, local and international Institutions. He knew whether as a Member of Parliament, Minister in the Cabinet, he was there to provide service for all, devoid of partisan cronyism or discriminatory treatment.

His wit was not confined to the political hustings.

The story is told of him waking up in the night to a man rummaging through his clothes closet. He called out - **“Man ah wah you a do in my room.”** The man replied, **“Hush up ah money mi a look.”** Roger retorted, **“But if I can’t find it by day how you going find it by night.”**

“Mi a come help you look.” The burglar disappeared in a hurry.

He was great at Weddings and not just Political Events with his humorous comments.

He was the M.C. at a Wedding and the Groom in his reply, on behalf of his bride and himself said, **“This is a marriage made in heaven.”** Whereupon Roger exploded, **“Careful my boy, so is thunder and lightening.”**

HIS CONFIDENCE

Roger Clarke's extraordinary impact on Jamaican society owed a great deal to the fact that Roger knew himself and was confident in that self-knowledge.

He did not need to seek the affirmation of the great and the powerful. He was never awed by the high and mighty, but maintained the common touch.

He was as comfortable with the yam farmer as he was with Heads of Corporations, local and international.

He once described a foreign consultant as “an ordinary person, a long way from home.”

Whether he was in the corridors of power or the chambers of arduous negotiations, Roger Clarke maintained his own way of making his presence felt and emerging as the winner.

There has been a lot said about his stewardship as Minister of Agriculture, with the tendency to focus only on his exploits in Jamaica. There is, however, a foreign dimension. He was well loved and respected internationally in the various fora in which he interacted, be it IICA, FAO, EU, CARICOM, ISO, or any of the many other agencies where he had to represent our cause. He was always effective in making our case and his wit and demeanor were a winning combination that worked every time to ensure a successful outcome.

HONOURING HIS MEMORY

He was an astute judge of what could and what could not spin

The Cabinet has lost the wisdom of one who fully understood the psyche of the common man.

We need to move beyond the sense of loss, the wealth and warmth of the tributes and take steps to honour him in our emulation of all that was good about this man.

Roger Clarke is a fine example of the coherent, integrated life in which personal attributes, life history, skills, opportunity and a decision to give political service have all come together to uplift the Jamaican people.

Roger Clarke created his own unique and distinctive brand. He leaves behind his large and indelible footprints on the sands of time.

The mix of today's congregation in this Church and the streets of Sav-la-Mar is irrefutable evidence that there is more which unites us than separates.

We remember him today as one who found the common denominator of patriotism that can bind us all, irrespective of green and orange, of age, gender or colour of skin.

Let his outstanding achievements and his more extraordinary personal qualities inspire his political colleagues on both sides of the aisle, the current and future aspirants to the race and crucially - the general population as we summon the vocal leaders of influence in our country to rise above those patterns of behaviour which alienate and diminish us as a people.

Let Roger's life encourage us to build rather than to tear down, to show true respect for all and to make Jamaica a more united, more generous and more productive country because we all, like him, understood ourselves, accepted our responsibilities and did what we should in the best way we could.

Walk good my brother as you bring a welcome sense of mirth and comradeship to the celestral Kingdom where peace and life eternal abound.