

# *Memories of a Friend and Colleague ... the late Gloria Clarke*

by Gloria E. Salmon

**GLORIA CLARKE** and I met for the first time in May 1957, when she joined the Jamaica Library Service (JLS) as a Junior Assistant. By leaving the Resident Magistrate's Court, Sutton Street, where she had been employed up to that time, she relinquished the idea of pursuing a legal career. Nevertheless, the legal training, which she had acquired up to that point, was always evident in the measured approach and logical thinking she utilised in her undertakings during the subsequent years.

Gloria climbed the professional Librarianship 'ladder' steadily, working in positions of increasing responsibility in several departments in the Headquarters and many of the thirteen Parish Libraries. Ultimately, she was appointed Deputy Director (the position now re-named Senior Director) and served in that capacity until her retirement in May 2002.

During her 45 years of service with the JLS, she travelled extensively throughout the island, going into the nooks and crannies of each Parish. She served in the Schools Bookmobile Service and the Parish Libraries bookmobile units to establish School Libraries, Book Centres and Branch Libraries; as well as to foster, among all age groups, a love of Reading for pleasure, information and the broadening of personal horizons. As Librarian in charge of each Parish Library to which she was assigned, she paid

special attention to ensuring effective administration, good

worker-management relations. Her participation in community activities was excellent.



She began her professional training in Librarianship through a work-study programme, which enabled her to sit the British Library Association's preliminary

examinations in Jamaica. Her perseverance and obvious ability were rewarded with the offer of a Jamaica Library Board scholarship to facilitate further study abroad. She did not accept this scholarship, however, but paid her own way to the Liverpool Polytechnic, England, where she successfully completed the requirements to become an Associate of the British Library Association (ALA). In later years, she accepted a Jamaica Library Board Award to visit libraries in the United States of America.

The Jamaica Library Service benefited greatly from her professional knowledge and exemplary personal qualities and, as a past Director recalls: "She served with dedication, distinction and commitment. She was always alert in identifying gaps where they existed and unobtrusively filled them. That was her unique forte."

During her various appointments to Parish and Regional positions, Gloria boarded with families that continued to be her lifelong friends. She often became the

adopted ‘auntie’ and mentor of the children of those families, and always encouraged them in their educational pursuits. She took keen interest in the children of her colleagues — rejoicing at their birth, interested in their successive growth stages, aware of the dates of their various examinations, and revelling in their achievements.

A genuine ‘people person’, Gloria was also committed to staff development and not only assisted with internal training programmes, but also encouraged staff members to qualify themselves for advancement within the system through other avenues.

Having been involved with the building and extension of several Parish Libraries, she developed special interest and expertise in the design of library buildings. She shared this expertise by teaching design of library buildings to architectural students at the College of Arts, Science & Technology (now the University of Technology, Jamaica). She also gave valuable advice to libraries outside the JLS system, and was particularly thrilled that, with the architectural insights she had gained, she was able to design her own house and, more recently, the Rector’s office at her church — Spanish Town Methodist Church.

Despite her indisputably calm, graceful demeanour and quiet charm, Gloria was a disciplinarian. Delinquent staff could always expect her firm admonishments and remedial action concerning their late-coming or inappropriate workplace dress and behaviour.

Firm in her convictions, she did not easily change an opinion or decision that she was convinced was valid. Nevertheless, her

heart and mind were always in the right place and, as one of her colleagues expressed it, “Gloria had a shrewd sense of humour and a very intense sense of fairplay...”.

She was a ‘walking encyclopaedia’ on the personalities who had used JLS libraries or attended various library functions over the years. She also served as an authentic map of Jamaica, having travelled the length and breadth of the island and knowing where each little district or town was located. These two characteristics greatly assisted in identifying persons who could serve as guest speakers or panellists at various library sites, or in directing drivers to delivery points within the Service.

In addition to her achievements at the Jamaica Library Service, Gloria made her mark in other organisations. She accepted nomination to serve as President of the Jamaica Library Association, now the Library & Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA). She performed with distinction in this capacity and, in the year of her presidency, successfully coordinated the planning and implementation of the programme to celebrate the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the International Association of School Librarians (IASL).

She was a foundation member of the Association of Librarians in the Jamaica Library Service (ALJALS), serving on the Executive, as its President and always supporting, guiding and assisting in all its programmes and activities.

She also served as the Deputy Chairperson of the Retired Members Section of LIAJA; a member of the Adult Learners’ Week Committee of the Jamaican Council for Adult Education (JACAE); and as

Committee member of various voluntary bodies including her church. She was a staunch Methodist, and volunteered her time unstintingly for church work.

Honoured in 1980 by the Institute of Jamaica with the award of its Centennial Medal for her many years of dedicated service as a Librarian, Gloria also received JLS Long Service Awards on the occasions of the Service's 21<sup>st</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. She was also a recipient of the Presidential Medal of the Library and Information Association and the ALJALS Award for Distinguished and Dedicated Service to that organisation.

A farmer's daughter, Gloria retained a love of the soil in addition to her professional accomplishments. She delighted in her garden. Her luxuriant flowers and fruit trees were testimony to her well-developed skills in that regard and gave her great joy. She shared with us

her happiness in planting each of her flowering plants, shrubs and trees; and eagerly distributed the fruits of her efforts to friends and colleagues. She would seek us out wherever we were to deliver her bag of goodies — ackees, black mangoes, otaheite apples ... and more.

Our memories of her kindness, her thoughtfulness, her wise advice and encouraging words in a variety of circumstances, will be cherished by all of us, her friends and colleagues, as long as we are alive.

Gloria has answered the call of our Heavenly Father, and she would not want us to mourn her departure indefinitely. Let us, therefore, treasure our happy memories of her and be thankful that she touched our lives in so many positive ways.

*May her soul rest in peace and light perpetual shine upon her.*

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