



THE 50th STANZA:

*For Joyce Ashuntantang on the Occasion of her
Golden Birthday from Friends, Family &
Colleagues*

July 1, 1966 – July 1, 2016

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The 50th STANZA

By Prof. Niyi Osundare

To that beneficent spirit who gave us EDUART
and keeps enriching our lives with songs which endure;
to that Teacher in the classroom without walls;
that Actress for whom all the world is a stage;
to that Mother who parents the Future;
for her hearty laughters and boundless vitality;
for all these and more,
I say HAPPY BIRTHDAY
as she sings this 50th stanza in life's endless song.

Keep that basket full
Keep the ashes aflame....

Happy Birthday, Joyce!

Tanure Ojaide

I have known Joyce for more than a decade. As is often the case, among us in the literary profession, I met her by reputation before meeting her physically. Joyce has always been lively, charming, and strong. She is a proud African woman who is multi-talented, sharply intelligent, highly creative, and astute in her intellectual pursuit. Her sister used to work in Charlotte, NC, and we met when she came to visit her. More regularly we meet at African literature conferences.

I praise her for her extraordinary multitasking. A single parent, she has worked like the legendary African mother to deny herself not just luxuries but basic comfort to make sure she takes good care of her children to grow up not lacking anything because of any limitations to her financial resources. She plays an exemplary motherly role. Often when we talk, she is on the road. She takes her sons to practice and soccer matches wherever they are scheduled to. For an academic to do this means a lot of sacrifice and Joyce is always glad to do what will make her children succeed. She is a sweet mother and I expect her boys to grow up not forgetting her singlehanded effort to nurture them fully.

Joyce is a fine poet. I have read her collections and written a blurb for one. As soon as I was appointed the African Ambassador to *Ogazine: International Poetry Magazine Online*, I immediately asked her to send some of her poems for publication in it. She is featured in the magazine and her poems present layers of female experience that often go unexpressed. Her images are strong, sensuous, and arresting. Though she has gone to many poetry festivals, including some in South America and in Greece, she needs to be presented more to those who have not read her poetry.

Joyce is not only a multi-tasker but multitalented artist. She has done drama pieces, performances of oral traditions, and produced a home video. She is a public speaker and her TED TALK performance shows the performative side of this woman of many talents.

Of course, Dr. Joyce Ashuntantang is a professor of English/literature and she has published extensively on the oral traditions of her Anglophone Cameroonian people. She promotes the culture of her Keyang people as well as the literature in English of Anglophone Cameroon. We share our minority status in our respective Cameroon and Nigeria and are thinking of doing some joint projects in that area.

Joyce, you are charming, bright, vivacious, intelligent, caring, and full of life. I am proud of you as my friend and sister. Happy Birthday! Many more decades to celebrate your humanity, success, and devotion to the African cause!

Childhood and Secondary School Memories

A Tribute to my Childhood Friend, Batuo

Anne Fondufe

Batuo, may be when we cross major milestones, like turning 40, and then 50, one catches oneself taking stock of life.

Buea, 1974. We first became friends at PS Buea Station. In those formative years, we did everything together: YP and Sunday school with Mr. Etango as our teacher, are the best memories I have of those magnificent years. We shared so much, including lunch in the dinning shed, rallies in places like Mevio, and after school recreational activities. We shared values of love for family, friends, and God.

Yes, later in life our journeys took us in different directions but our hearts have always remained knitted together. It was no surprise that when I had to say 'I do', I still needed you by my side as my maid of honor. You did not hesitate. I may not talk to you as often as I should, but I am comforted by the knowledge that you're always at the other end of the telephone line when I need to talk.

You continue to inspire me with all your accomplishments, but then again, I am not surprised. Today we celebrate 'You'. God has blessed you with so much, and we give Him all the glory. Today we celebrate the motivator you are to lots of us, the friend you are to lots of us, the aunt you are to lots of us, the teacher you are to lots of us, the mentor you are to lots of us, and the mom you are to lots of kids, but above all, today I celebrate the sister God blessed me with so many years ago. Thanks for being there for me.

Enjoy your next 50 plus years and remember you are a blessing!

Happy 50th birthday my sister/ friend!!!!

Love always

Anne Yakum –Fondufe

A Friend in Need and in Deed

By Ethel Caspa

My dear Dr. J

I am going to leave the academia to your colleagues and just deal with the personal person that I know.

We met in 1981 when I was just a little girl. Upon arrival at Saker Baptist college, I had no idea what was about to happen. At such a tender age, one's fears are so many. Then I was assigned a dormitory and in that dorm room our friendship was waiting to happen. I truly cannot explain how it all started but I knew once we met that I had found a friend in need and in deed. Our friendship seemed so weird at the time.

It felt like I just picked someone I've never seen before and said, yeah why not? I liked her and suddenly I just started to do stuff with her.

Over the years we have maintained that friendship from across the globe as well as when we are together. Today we share so many inside jokes; everything crazy I do or say seems to happen when I am around you. You have grown to be a successful woman- a mother and an academician that I admire and learn from daily. The laughs and conversations we share are priceless. In many scenarios our thoughts seem to be in unison. Oh and I sure don't want to mention those scenarios

The best thing about our friendship is that, we don't have to meet or talk often to know that we are thinking about each other. But when we do meet or talk, we sure do a good job of catching up.

Today your maker is proud of you and all that you have achieved in the last half century. Now you are ready to soar through the other half century with flying colors.

"Friends are like diamonds, they are forever" May the almighty continue to protect and guide you.

Wishing you abundant blessings as you celebrate today and beyond.

Happy birthday dearest Dr. J

From your personal person!!!

Ethel Caspa

Johns Hopkins University
Bloomberg School of Public Health
Baltimore, Maryland.

My Experiences with Joyce and Lessons Learnt

By Constance Morara*

On September 19th, 1981, up the hills of Saker Baptist College, Victoria (now Limbe); I met with Sister Joyce.

We happened to have been in the same dormitory-SALZMAN dormitory. I was a new student in Form One and thought she was a Form One student too, since we all came on the same day, but what marveled me about her was that she looked bigger than me in every aspect. When we had to sleep on bunk beds, she slept directly above me. I kept on wondering what kind of Form One student she was, sleeping up i.e. "mounting" as we fondly called it.

Then a couple of days later, the dormitory head introduced her and told us we had to address her "Sister Joyce", because she was in Form Four. It is the tradition in Saker for all Form One and transferred students to resume school on the same day before the rest of the school.

Though a senior student to me, I quickly realized I easily interacted with her, more than the other Form Three or Four students. I felt freer just playing with her or even trying to involve her in my childlike plays. An experience I can't forget was my incessant pushing of her bed from under (since I was sleeping below her). On this fateful day, she was so tired, she got furious and just pounced on me. I was lucky the dormitory head pleaded with her saying "Please don't carry your trouble from that mosquito"--I was so slim, and smallish.

She had few friends and like us in Form One, was still trying to get used to the new environment.

Saker Baptist College had water problems and we had to go off campus to fetch water. When water got restored, a poetry competition was launched for the best poem on water. Sister Joyce came out with the best poem and received an award in front of the whole school. Our music director, Aunty Claudia Fokam (now Buma Kor) realized her talent and asked her to write a poem which she made into a song and the choir presented it during festivities marking 11th February 1983. That song, "My Privileged Country" is still found in the Saker Song Book today.

I was only in Form Two when Sister Joyce graduated, but her name, her person, her creativity, have always lingered in my mind-consciously and unconsciously.

This poem triggered something in me; it remained in my mind, and is my inspiration.

She invigorated me as a child with this poem. I kept on wondering to myself till today

"How can a 15-16-year-old write such a poem in the kind of community, society we were and studied?" I now realize even the rigidity of the education back home did not stifle

her creativity, ingenuity and inventiveness. Honestly, I hero-worship her from a distance.

Joyce`s ingenuity was further buttressed by her studies of works of Artists like TS Eliot,

Chaucer, James Joyce, Shakespeare, Achebe, Butake, Eyoh and Soyinka just to name

these, and manifested when in the 90s as a student in the University of Yaounde, I saw

her acting in the Flame Players and in the Yaounde University Theatre under Professor

Eyoh and Butake.

My admiration for her kept on increasing and I vowed to myself, "I must become like

Sister Joyce."

From then, I started tracing and trying to follow her steps. I hear she went to Britain, and

then ENS, then the Pilot Linguistic Center. I have followed those very steps, though my

Master`s Degree was done in Buea.

I closely monitored some of her research on Achebe`s manuscript of the famous

"Things Fall Apart"

I had to buy and read All Achebe`s works because of her.

When I set my foot into this nation, she was one of the first I tried to contact.

She actually gave a strong recommendation for me to be hired as an ESOL Instructor in

Maryland. I have not stopped admiring you Sister Joyce. Your insatiable desire for

knowledge, your ingenuity, and your creativity... make you a very strong force to be

reckoned with. You are Worthy, Special and Loved.

**Saker petite*

High School and University Life

Golden Goals (Golden Jubilee Tribute to Prof. Joyce Ashuntantang)

By Tangyie Peter Suh Nfor

On the Notice Board between the Form Five and Lower Sixth classrooms, on foolscap paper and in confident handwriting, the “notice” ran in lines and stanzas. It was definitely an expression of personal feelings and thoughts (can’t remember on what subject), in some deliberate rhythmic style. It was signed, Joyce Ashuntantang (LA3). I was heading for LA3 when it caught my attention, so after the “Good morning, Sir” formalities, I immediately wanted to identify “... Joyce... *ehm, ehm*, ... who has a poem on the Notice Board”. The class noticed I was searching for the other name, so they completed the name for me. She stood up. “Aah, no doubt!” I remarked, and asked which school she came from, and she replied “Saker Baptist College”. “I see.” I complimented her poem and asked those in the class who had not read it to do so. I found some other time to draw attention to her talent, and to discuss her aspirations. That was towards the end of the first term of the 1983/84 academic year in GHS Mbengwi at the time. It is now GBHS Mbengwi.

“Aah, no doubt!” because she had already distinguished herself as an “active student.” She asked and answered questions freely and offered to read roles in Shakespeare’s *Othello* which we were treating during that term, with great enthusiasm. If there were internet at the time, I would have concluded she was using it for her contributions in class. The one Lower Sixth student who could dare say “I disagree” and substantiate. Albeit I was only in my second year of teaching, I was unquestionably a very popular A/L Literature part time teacher in Lay Private, Mission and Evening schools in and around Bamenda town wherein I met varied levels of abilities. Yet, Joyce Batuo Ashuntantang was in a class of her own. I knew my strength was not just in the mastery of the texts, but much more in my dramatic style. It was visible across the genres as I put in effort to demonstrate that all genres were equally compelling. My motto was, “Literature is Life” and we used it to punctuate lessons. I saw that dramatic bent in Joyce’s readings and I guess I was her “kind” of teacher; for definitely she was my “kind” of student! As one of the pioneer students of the Drama & Theatre Arts option started by late Professor Ndumbe Eyoh in Yaounde University, I entered the teaching

field with enough motivation to run drama clubs. Having produced *The Merchant of Venice* with Nacho students the year before, Joyce's readings, I must say, prompted me to cast *Othello* for production with the GHS Mbengwi drama club. Her role as Desdemona gave the club and the school, national publicity. The entire cast was good and she played other roles in other plays, but Desdemona was, simply put, enacted at "another level". No period costumes, no elaborate scenery, lighting, props, but basic improvisations and focus on voice projection and action. For two academic years, and with the highly motivated cast, we were on tour at the least opportunity. When we performed in CPC Bali where the no-nonsense critic Bate Besong was teaching at the time, he was so thrilled that he could find time for a newspaper review. He put me in the caption as "...the maestro of theatre business"; while one of Joyce's comments read: "...Joyce Ashuntantang whose extremely commendable role as Desdemona has already kneaded for her a small contingent of worshippers..."

For a student who had just obtained O/L levels to have engaged in writing poetry and having the audacity to put on Notice Board for all to read in a new school in which she had scarcely spent three months; for her smartness in class to have caught the attention of almost all her teachers in such a short time, and to have portrayed such acting skills that early, her background was obviously solid. When she said she was from Saker Baptist College, my response as indicated above was, "I see". Some schools just instill discipline and hard work in their students, such that when mentioned, one just nods. I later also understood her parents were seasoned educationists and this of course had implications on her approach to studies. Joyce had just graduated from Mbengwi and poised to begin her university studies when they were called home in a tragic manner, but I have no doubt they are not disappointed with how far all their children have continued with the relay baton. Birago Diop tells us, "Those who are dead have never gone away" and I guess the children can better testify to their presence in their lives. I see them in this golden jubilee celebration very forcefully.

Beyond high school, Joyce continued and has continued to make news. Her time in Yaounde University was even more vibrant. My friend, late Kwasen Gwangwa'a once remarked that she was such a phenomenal person to identify with. Before I opened my eyes, she was reading for a Masters degree in Library Sciences in Aberystwyth, U.K.

Not long after, it was second cycle higher teachers training college, which ushered her into teaching in the Yaounde Linguistic Centre attached to the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon and Chief of Service in the central administration. Hey, next minute I only heard Joyce had left for the States. She informed me of this movement by assigning me to help collect data on the reading habits of my staff in GHS Bafut, as she was reading for a terminal degree. It was scarcely a month and I had collected very little, when the news came via e-mail that she had defended the Doctorate so well – here then was Dr. Joyce Ashuntantang! My God! I thought she was still starting! With the coming of the internet, especially Facebook, I do follow up with her international tours, the reading of her poems here and there, her presentation of papers in conferences and publications in journals as renowned as ***African Literature Today***. From seventeen-years-old Joyce to fifty-years-old Professor Joyce Ashuntantang!! When she tells her story she does not forget anyone who contributed to it, however small. I am humbly proud I always feature. That's Joyce – intelligent, hardworking, outspoken, proactive and appreciative. Victor Hugo believes, "Forty is the old age of youth, fifty the youth of old age". A semi-centennial deserves a party. Only by His Grace can we come thus far. It's celebration and it's reflection time. Many goals have been scored; yet goals for the second half must be scored. As long as we remain players in the field called life, we must be playing. No player gets satisfied with goals scored. This, I think is what Les Brown means when he tells us, "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."

Congratulations Professor, many more returns and higher heights!!!

TANGYIE Peter SUH-NFOR

Principal, GBHS Bamenda.

Co-ordinator, ACWA NW/W Regions.

Joyce and I

Frederick Ayang

We went to the same High school Joyce and I
GHS Mbengwi was our School
We lived in the same quarters Joyce and I
I passed her entrance to mine and saw her shut her window
We acted in the same troupe Joyce and I
The Drama club of GHS Mbengwi
Twice I loved and lost her in two plays
Othello and This is our Chance
We went to same University Joyce and I
The University of Yaoundé
We were in the same department Joyce and I
The English Department
We acted in the same troupes Joyce and I
The Flame Players and the University Theatre troupes
In class she was always flying and flew away
I kept guard, now with my rifle I sing the infantry song,

Joy of Joyce

By Irmagard Anchang Langmia

The joy of Joyce's friendship is a precious gem to behold;
Thoughts of adolescent years caught in the dusty paths
of naïve academic exuberance where doves of heavenly
Angels and psychological Freudian flames from Dante's
hell in Mbib's 8. 00p.m class at E-111 tingle the soul,
to become faint memories of Ngoa-Ekele's illustrious,
yet darkly luminous academic past, of political wrath that blur a future
reminders of a past that we once thread, before we were here,
caught in the technological web of today's Diasporic mantras
in blissful joy. Yet, none can slow the pace, nor taint the hem
of she that exudes so much energy and kindness. The dream is here
to stay Joyce, and yours is one that embraces every native-immigrant
path with luscious academic accolades, then, *Anglishes* from Africa
to the West. Your artistic muse so becomes a part of your energetic *chi*.¹

Joy as in Joyce, the lamp that never fades, but torches on
academically and motherly with the vibrancy
of inherited values, for a past and a present well merited.
This is the woman that I know, a joyful spirit, full of natural
exuberance, when that glorious, unique laughter dimples
your cheeks.

Our future is our past and our past our future.

May the day continue to break and may the heavenly stars
continue to lace the joy of Joyce's path webbed
in millennial episodes of continuing techno-artistic muses

¹ Chi- word borrowed from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

till the stars nod.

Irmagard Anchang Langmia

April 26, 2016

Elkridge, Maryland

Joyce, Remember?

By Emelda Ngufor Samba

'Over fifty and it still works' was the inscription on a key holder owned by Prof Bole Butake before he turned fifty. In our twenties, we all wondered how that could be possible. When we celebrated his 50, it sounded so distant, like we will never get there. As I look back at those years, I realise how limited we were in our thinking. We all are now turning fifty and it seems like it has just started working. When I speak to Joyce on the phone, I feel the same energy, the same vivacity that was present some three decades when we reconnected at the then University of Yaounde.

I want to remember my school days with Joyce not just as a friend, and classmate but also as a co-actress at the Yaounde University Theatre, the Master Key Theatre and the Flame players. Bole Butake and Kwasen Gwangwa'a both playwrights, actors and artistic directors saw the artists in us and committed themselves to nurture the talents that had been groomed from our secondary school and high school days. I can still see Joyce in the role of Yensi in Butake's *Lake God* (my favourite lines being 'Echong echong oh) and as Woman (Mboysi) in the same author's play, *The Survivors*. I still remember the euphoria in the Amphi Theatre 700 when Joyce as woman killed the unscrupulous officer with his own gun that she had wittingly taken from him. I also have memories of the disappointment that swept across the theatre when another officer killed Woman in the height of her victory dance. Those who knew me and Joyce at the time still stop me on the street to ask why Butake killed Mboysi. As I look back, I see Joyce as Pamela sitting on the bed, holding her blood stained pant and weeping uncontrollably just after Mr. Ngange my husband (played by Valentine Mungyeh) had just raped her in Kwasen Gwangwa'a's *Seminal Dregs*.

It did not matter whether Joyce was dancing *Kwesinkwe* in Butake's *Lake God*, playing Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*, or just eating roast fish and fried plantains at Melen after a hard day's job, it was just JOYCE; motivated, enthusiastic, committed and determined to accomplish a goal.

I will take you even four decades back when Joyce and I were Sunday school children at the Presbyterian Church Buea Station. Mr. Elango (God alone knows where he is now) our Sunday School teacher fanned the artists in us. He drilled us through singing, memory verses, bible quizzes and church drama. He could never imagine how far his little tips on creativity, specifically acting, were going to take us.

Remember this?

Come along Moses strike the rock, oh yes I know.

He strikes the rock and the water divide²

Oh yes I know

Wah ye this world by and by the river of Jordan,

Wah ye this world

Bye and bye the river side

Jerusalem oh my happy home.

Wah ye Jerusalem.

Pastor Elango taught us *Jerusalem*.

Rev Kangsen taught us *Jerusalem...*

It is not possible to think of my childhood days with Joyce and not remember Emilia Ashutantang, Joyce's elder sister who passed away in her early teens. Emilia was one of the Sunday school leaders and was very prominent in our theatre activities. Just after playing the role of Martha in a Bible story during one of our Sunday school rallies, she went to boarding school and we were told she drowned. As children, that was our first encounter with death and I remember when we went to condole with Joyce we could only peep through the window with speculations of what death really meant. As was tutored by our Sunday school teacher, we sang this song at her funeral:

Oh freedom

Oh freedom

Oh freedom over her, over her,

And before she will be a slave

² We sang as we thought we heard, not minding the tenses and other grammatical structures.

*She'll be buried in her grave
And go home to her Lord and be free.*

Again we sang with little understanding of what that freedom meant.

When we reconnected at the then University of Yaounde in 1986 as students of English Modern Letters minoring in Theatre Arts we adventured in new theatre Master key theatre was another stage of our Artistic exploits. From province to province, town to town and school to school, we dramatized poems and excerpts of plays on the secondary and high school curriculum. And within this period I rediscovered the Joyce of today: a combination of hard work, intelligence, professionalism and humour. A woman bubbling with life yet so focused on her academic work. How she managed the two so successfully was always a wonder to me and most of her friends. She will study late into the night but will still find the time to go get roast fish and *bobolo* at Melen before going to sleep. Joyce would get up one day and say she wanted to start walking with 'nyanga' and you will find her all day trying to change the way she walked. It was and still is great fun just being with Joyce.

She knew pain at an early age; the loss of her elder sister and the loss of her parents at her teens. How that moulded her life I can only guess... she wants to provide for her two sons what she could not get from her parents. She worked very hard at the university but blended that with a fun life. Sometimes I had the feeling she was telling herself 'life is short in this world, sorrows cover the earth, shall I live? Oh yes we shall live, says the Lord, oh Lord we shall live' another song we sang during her sister's funeral.

Joyce has just started impacting lives. For a woman of such intelligence, creativity, open-mindedness and generosity, we can only pray God keeps her long enough to fulfil her purpose here on earth.

The Latter Years

Joyce Dey Write Fine Fine Na
By Ken Kessel (Delivered at the birthday party)

Weave words as
Wicker-basket reeds
Intertwine
Seamlessly

As the loom shapes
The warp and weft
Thread-hues bare their
Voiceless seaching selves
Serving higher harmonies
Soulfully

Birthing

Propositions

Prepositions

Preposteritions

Policiticans
Of degenderization
Resexualization
Realization
Rumination
Bedroomination
Affirmation
Afronations
Affrontations
Abominations
Feminations
Mamanations
Auntinations
Ablutions
Restitutions

Intimations
Of soulinations

Makosa
Pakosa
Grammakosa
Grandpakossa

And little babykossa

Coming closer
To the notion
That there's a solution
For our confusion
If we cast off the illusion
Of the primal intrusion
Of intractable bleakness
Of spirit

Can you hear it
Cry its own freedom
Bursting from
Medom
To Wedom

All mon fit go
Na wah oh
It's not too funky

Just remember
What we say
In the talk of my country

Small small catch monkey

Dr. Joyce Ashuntantang: Activist, Actor & Advocate

Performer, Poet & Professor

Educator, Facilitator, Leader, Mentor, Literary Guru & Organizer

By Dr. Jerry Komia Domatob

Some legends epitomize versatility
As they are endowed, with myriad capability
Awash in abundant treasure
They share with grand pleasure

Such precious wealth
Blessing many as good health
Springs from Prof. Joyce Batuo Ashuntantang's territory
Many embrace as coveted victory

Powerful and persuasive orator
Who excels as a star communicator?
Dr. Joyce shines, like an ace educator
Many celebrate as a facilitator

Natural and admired sage
Towering on universal stage
Her wisdom and foresight
Empowers as her tactics and insight

Distinguished and seasoned teacher
Dr. Joyce soars as a researcher
Indefatigable rock of scholarship

She glitters as a knowledge ship

Revered and accomplished organizer

Folks cherish as an astute “mobilizer”

Dr. Joyce’s admirable synergy

Vibrates with positive energy

Global author and poet of distinction

Her stories elicit standing ovation

Dancer, entertainer, Emcee and historian

Commentator, editor, essayist and “documentarian”

Salute to a renowned internationalist

Yes, a famous catalyst

Bravo to a bosom mother, sister & friend

Aunt, mentor and counselor who shuns the fiend

Happy, jolly, and jubilant anniversary

Dr. Prof, Ma Joyce Batuo Ashuntantang

Dr. Jerry Komia Domatob is a Mass Communication Professor at Alcorn State University, Lorman-Mississippi. A journalist, photographer, poet and researcher, he is currently working on two projects. His latest publications are: ***Communication, Culture and Human Rights*** and ***Positive Vibration***.

Prof. Joyce Ashutantang: Achiever, Analyst & Academic

By Prof. Jerry Komia Domatob

She is lavishly exceptional
As a monumental professional
Professor Joyce Ashutantang's rich arsenal
Powers like an elevated personal

Articulate presenter of eloquence
She empowers many gain influence
Reputed for lavish devotion
Dr. Joyce incarnates dedication

Star scholar and master guide
She goads many, turn negative tide
Mistress of the spoken word
She controls and dribbles the written word

Marvelous and generous
Fabulous and serious
Dr. Joyce's impactfulness
Wrestles with her tough faithfulness

Firm, fair and decisive
Thorough, thoughtful and incisive
Prof. Joyce's noble activity
Inspire as her creativity

When inevitable adversity
Slams with unavoidable intensity

Dr. Joyce's tenacity
Kicks in as rational velocity

International anchor and activist
Dr. Joyce outpaces as a positivist
Terror of the vain pessimists
She infuses hope as a lead optimist

Hooray to an edifying educator
Writer, artist and editor
Bravo to a family rock and meticulous root
Yes, Dr. Joyce illuminates paths, for the righteous foot

Port Gibson Mississippi 05/28/16

True African Woman (For Professor Joyce Ashuntantang)

By Ekpe Inyang

When the name I first heard
Matched with plans of a great event
In honour of a fallen Iroko Tree

I saw in my mind's eyes
A lady in full display of grey hair
Majestic look, pompous gait
Imperious tone to announce
Her place on the Ivory Tower
Like those we have around

But on the evening of that great event
A celebration of unprecedented magnitude
The crafting yet of a great historical drama
The Immortalisation of the Most Fearless
Obasinjom Warrior

I saw the picture of a true African woman
Beautiful but humble, soft-spoken
Dishing out in unrivalled generosity
Dinner of commendations to a tall Iroko Tree
Under whose canopy the fallen one picked up a ray of light
And grew out of a neighbouring forest rich in the craft

Yes, she did it-dragged heavy Yoruba wood
To Mount Fako foot
Tall, tough but humble-looking wood
To meet indigenous species
And form a huge canopy to pitch
The event at the most deserved height

Yes, she's scored the golden goal
And in her I see a lady with great vision
Ambition, full of force skillfully concealed
In the pouch of a true African woman
Humbly hiding the greyness of her hair
Beneath the dark hair of youth

Joyce - Unique Stone

By Ozong Agborsangaya-Fiteu

Joyce. jewel.

The pride of our heritage

Poetic muse

Dazzling star

The beauty of her smile

As wide as the river Nile.

Joyce. Gem

Fruit of our birthright

This warrior spirit

With her golden pen

And deep wind chime laughter

Like her father's daughter.

Joyce. Unique stone

Our own Cicero

Feminist femme fatale

A force

compassionate

Like elephant footprints.

Joyce

Pearl from mother's milk

Through thicket and thorn

Though thick and thin

Will be taller

like Manhattan's skyline.

Young but Old in Words

By Antonia Manyi Agbor

Hmm! where will I begin. This Joyce you are seeing or have heard of, is a book full of wisdom. She is fifty today, but far back when I was (and even now) going through some issues, she would speak to me with the wisdom of an old woman, and sooner rather than later, my head would clear up. Both of us would burst into a good satisfactory laughter. When next I needed help I would go back to that book and again my head would be refreshed.

I call her Ma'Batuo, eh Prof, "Ane batusori". It means, "see me trouble". We would delve into "Keyang", "Bayangi". With this again she beats my imagination. I always thought I knew this language, but when Joyce speaks, it comes with deep proverbs whose meaning she would then explain to me. I would gasp, "prof, wohnkwo", how do you know all this? She explains, "my father, my mother", in Bayangi- etaya, maya. Oh! "They embedded this wise way of looking at life very early in me." We end our conversations every time with a big satisfactory laughter, saying "obuere- in Bayang, meaning, good night.

Joyce, you have always lifted me up and told me, "You are a strong woman". But at your age, Prof. you are a stronger woman.

May God give you long life.

Amen and Amen.

Antonia Agbor

You, my Dear, Have Been a True Sister and Friend

By Esther Bakume

If only I could be there to say all of these to you in person, I would be satisfied... Ma Batuo I am so sorry I cannot be there with you. I love you so much and wish you many more of such days, weeks, months and years

You are one of very few friends of mine with whom I catch up in the smoothest and sweetest manner no matter how long the silence between us had been. We would talk and talk as if our last conversation was just yesterday. You, my dear, have been a true sister and friend? So, sistercoco, how can I hold back from using this beautiful opportunity to show off my well-deserved sister to the rest of the world.

We go way back darling. I am only going to struggle to be concise, for there is too much to say and less time. Family friendship added more strength to our Saker Sisterhood. Yes, darling, all your achievements from a tender age have always been loudly applauded by me. I remember the first time I saw you on national television as one of the flame players. Hear my exclamation which made everyone around me get so curious as to who this Batuo is. "Na Batuo that o, Na Batuo that o, for television. This MA sister dong go far ey" I told them that you were PA Ashuntantang's daughter, Tanjong's sister. Those who did not know PA, knew Tanjong since he was a regular son of the house. Guess what? The number of fans increased right there and then.

That was just the beginning and then we found ourselves in North America as mothers and wives. Your overseas visit with my boys to my humble Abbott in Montreal just tied my bond with you with a third cord. You are a true sister and friend, a loyal and loving one in every sense. You, my love, are the most inspiring personality I have ever known. Sometimes when I read your works, your achievements, I can't help but wonder "where she gets the time and the strength to keep up in all these great works." Yes sweetheart heart you are selfless, enthusiastic and caring. You give your all for the good of others. Keep up the good work.

You are so much loved and admired. I am so sorry to miss the show and show-showism of this event.

Joyce Through the Years

By Judith Foyabo

I have known Joyce, fondly called Dr. J, for over 3 exciting and entertaining decades. My first encounter was with a poem she wrote about the water scarcity in Saker Baptist College, Limbe-Cameroon. As a teenager her words were already ripe for music, literally as was the case of that poem "water-water - give me water to drink". While the choir Mistress conducted the choir through that section, I paraded the stage with a kettle rubbing my throat and looking for water. Joyce continued to excel in writing and acting earning an award in poetry from Saker. Joyce progressed in that path trailblazing the theater to TV acting where she quickly became a household sensation in Anglophone Cameroon. I missed some of her major artistic accomplishments from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties. However, not long after I arrived the United States her most acclaimed Movie "Potent Secrets" was released and I was back in her realm again totally thrilled. I have since made it a point to get her publications because I was sure to be thoroughly entertained or/and well-schooled in rare topics as in "Landscaping Postcoloniality ..." (one of her books I read together with my mom).

Her community spirit particularly in the diaspora has given many a voice in things that matter such as women issues. Even her Facebook musings give me a reason to browse.

Joyce has been an inspiration to me and many who have come to admire and love her works. This includes the underserved and her students and colleagues in academia.

Dr. J, I enjoy your academic prowess and appreciate the commitment, dedication, and passion with which you deliver each time. A very blessed and Happy Birthday my dear friend; I pray the Lord continue to be the wind beneath the wings that propel you to soar to even greater heights.

PS: You are only half of a century old so dance the night away...

Blessings, Judith Caspa Foyabo

Oruko e nro e

By Prof. Pamela Smith a.k.a Iyalode

My Dear, Dear Joyce (as in my Dear, Dear Daughter – Yes, the Iyalode’s Very Own Daughter),

As the Yoruba say proverbially: *Oruko e nro e* (literally, you and your name “wear” each other fittingly well). This BIG occasion finally gives me the chance to tell you so in no uncertain terms. To have known you these few years is to have known you many years ago, it seems, because there is that un-nameable “something” gift which envelops and orbits you in sheer delight and always bursts forth each time to meet the world with laughter, like an opening, flowering bud. Perhaps by now you have finally figured out why your Iyalode mother always wants to “share a room with you at ALA conferences.” If I were to “translate” a literary passage into Yoruba about one Joyce Ashuntantang, Ashum Princess, I most certainly will violate my own steadfast rule on nomenclature – I would “christen” Joyce, naming her Princess (My Princess) LAUGHTER CONTENTMENT Ashuntantang. Yes, indeed! That’s the secret of why I always look forward to rooming with you (and pray you’d say “yes” each time) at ALA conferences.

Your giftedness is immeasurable and you have continued to exude your ability to share it with the world with gusto! I feel blessed indeed being a beneficiary of the few gems you have shared with me from the Innumerable “Stories” – yes, the treasury of rich stories my Sister, Mama Ashuntantang bestowed upon you, nay deposited in your care. I am sure she is mighty proud of all you’ve done with this inheritance, thus far, because (you do not know that) I tell her all the time how well she’s “gifted” you and prepared you as “custodian of stories.” I also still marvel and tell her how impressed, nay awed, I am about the way you have managed to turn sorrow/sadness into “gold!” “Excellent travail” – your grade thus far! I’m sure she will concur!

Now, as you scale this new height and begin to venture into the hallowed halls of “Senior Citizenship,” please, be kind to yourself, especially in instances such as when you might be frantically looking for your pair of glasses but forget that it’s been sitting on your forehead all along! Etc. □ Remember, it’s all a stage and a state of being – quite normal, I promise. But I’ll be here, waiting with all kinds of words of wisdom, even some lies as well, if that’s what it takes to elicit some sweet stories from you. Yes, my love, the stories – that’s all we’ve got. You have the stories; and yes, I have the set of waiting ears! How lucky the boys are and their children and children’s children!

Have a happy and blessed celebration, my love. Thank you for gifting me with your very beautiful being! I love you!

Big Bear Hugs (X a million times)!

Mom Iyalode Pam

Talented and Unique Sister

By Mary Tabot

It is indeed a special kind of weekend when you find yourself in the company of very special friends and family to celebrate a great milestone of one of our beloved sisters. Dr. J, my very Talented and Unique "Baby Sister": I welcome you warmly into the Famous Fifty and Fabulous Club. I feel very fortunate and proud to have worked with Dr. J on the National Executive Committee of the outstanding Alumni organization ExSSA USA. where she held positions of Publicity Secretary and Organizing secretary respectively within a six-year time period. This electric Professor, Actress, poet, Story teller, Historian, and Cultural guru never ceases to amaze her audience and those around her with her God given talents. I am so proud of the woman she has become. I am hereby wishing you a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous Birthday and may God continue to bless you as you reach out and touch all the lives that cross your path Your Saker Sister Mary Tabot.

A Prayer to the Almighty God for Dr. Joyce

Dear God, I have a friend called Joyce B Ashutantang. On the occasion of her 50th anniversary, I stand as an intercessor for her. Thank you father for her life, her successes, her challenges, joys and pains. Thank you father for the lives she has impacted both at the social sphere and the Academia. Thank you Lord that she has been my friend over the past forty years. Thank you father for the mistakes we made together and the lessons we learnt together. On this special day, may her joy and happiness overflow and reach out to the thousands who have known her and are still to know. May the 'thespian' in her break cultural and racial grounds and may her works be recognised worldwide. May she do greater things than her parents ever did or would have ever done. May she be a role model to all those who look up to her. May all those who celebrate '50' with her tap from her creativity, resourcefulness, generosity, resilience, and steadfastness. May she live to see her children's children and may she live to eat the fruits of her labour.

Lord, bless her as a mother, a tutor, a friend, a guide, a counsellor. Joyce, be blessed.

Best Wishes from University of Hartford

(From the English Department of Hillyer College, University of Hartford)

Dear Joyce: HAPPY BIRTHDAY!! Congratulations on this milestone birthday, and also on having such a wonderful circle of family and friends to celebrate with you. I've seen one of your "happy dances"; I hope you are doing happy dances all through your birthday celebration and beyond!

I'm delighted to be able to add a few words of tribute here, on behalf of myself and also our entire department at the University of Hartford. Over these past years, I've had welcome opportunities to write pages upon pages of enthusiastic professional tributes for all of your wonderful work with us. You've been a terrific colleague and we are delighted ongoing to be working with you. And so I'll take this opportunity to add a few more-personal comments here. (And I'll paste in a few excerpts from one of those letters at the end, in case there's room in the tributes that you'll keep and share with your family.)

When you first came to our college, we welcomed your energy, your enthusiasm, your many-sided expertise in teaching, scholarship, poetry, performance. Since then, all of that confidence in you has only been confirmed and increased. You give your all to all you do. And we are in awe of the pace at which you do it, moving apparently seamlessly from working one on one with students to teaching classes to travelling for professional conferences to doing a poetry reading to organizing an event to . . . Whew! You do a lot, and all you do you do well. And you do it all with a deeply caring spirit, both for your students and for your colleagues.

And what we didn't fully know was what a warm and wonderful colleague and friend we would be gaining. Your positive energy makes a huge difference, in individual interactions and in the ongoing life of the department and the college. We are so glad we get to laugh with you, chat with you, share ideas with you. And we are honored that a valued colleague has become a treasured friend. Now that's a real blessing!

Though I'm not able to be there in person in NYC, I am certainly there with you in spirit. Let that happy dance loose! I send you my very best wishes – for your next 50!

*Warmly,
~Marcia*

Postscript: Professional Kudos

A small sample of the professional kudos Joyce has earned, excerpted from her promotion and tenure recommendation

She's a Great Teacher!

Joyce brings a welcome versatility of teaching areas to the department and beyond. While thoroughly versed in our first-year composition and introduction to literature courses, she has also taught ENB 230 Literature Across Cultures, with emphasis on diverse African cultures; ENB 250 African American Literature, a new course in our curriculum; the Hillyer honors seminar “Art on a Mission: When Art Goes Beyond Itself,” exploring the role of the arts in social change; and the Survey of Minority Writers in the English Department of Arts and Sciences. Through her own experiences as member of the Anglophone minority in Cameroon as well as her rich scholarship in this area among many others in African Studies, she offers complex insights in such courses that greatly benefit our students, conveyed via her richly linked skills as teacher, poet, and performer.

As I saw firsthand when I sat in on one of her classes, Joyce uses an effective variety and pacing of teaching methods that assure students are thoroughly engaged as well as continually challenged to push beyond their existing understandings. She can energize students to participate in an all-class discussion, keep them focused while working in small groups, hold a productive literature-based discussion with them on Facebook, or leave them wanting more after a class session Skyping with the African poet whose works they have been reading. Joyce’s student evaluations show strong results as well as increased scores over time. Students typically praise her rapport with them, seeing her as “inspiring and awesome” while also expecting the very best of them. She “gets everyone excited to learn.”

She's a Great Poet and Scholar!

Joyce has written two books: one of scholarship, *Landscaping Postcoloniality: The Dissemination of Anglophone Cameroon Literature*, and one of poetry, *A Basket of Flaming Ashes*, both published by Langaa/Michigan State University Press. In addition, she has placed articles in peer-reviewed journals, numerous poems and a story in collections, two entries on African writers in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and numerous other articles and interviews in newsletters and magazines, as well as a screenplay produced as a film (for which she also served as director and lead actress). She has been invited to read her poetry at international festivals in Granada, Nicaragua and Medellin, Colombia. She regularly presents her scholarship and performs her poetry at the African Literature Association and other venues. Even a brief journey through her professional materials offers such treats as a photo of her with Chinua Achebe, accompanying her interview with him upon the fiftieth anniversary of *Things Fall Apart*, and a selection of her poetry translated into Spanish in *Revista de poesia: Prometeo*, from the Colombia festival. Joyce has built strong scholarly and creative momentum, all amidst the busy pace of her Hillyer teaching and advising: for example, two new book chapters, on human rights in *Hotel Rwanda* and on the Cameroonian Playwright Bole Butake and environmental issues, plus a new journal article on the South African writer Es'kia Mphahlele. As a sample of her visibility, she was asked to write the entry on Achebe for the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*.

Joyce's outside reviewers for promotion and tenure are all full professors in the humanities, with considerable stature in their fields, and all have high praise for her work. One reviewer lauds her "profound knowledge and familiarity with the works of the vast array of African and Cameroonian authors" and claims "her work is an important addition to the understanding of African literature and culture." A second reviewer is "very much impressed by the quality of her creative and, especially, her scholarly work"; calls her "a talented, original, and productive colleague"; and praises her "love for writing and a fine fascination for the nuances of language." He references an additional expert voice: "As the preeminent scholar of African literature, Bernth Lindfors, points out in his blurb piece, Ashuntantang's scholarly book 'is the

most comprehensive study of Anglophone Cameroon literature that has been published to date.” The third reviewer states that “Ashuntantang’s scholarship is generating refreshingly new knowledge on Cameroonian literature.” Readers of Joyce’s work, whether prose or poetry, hear the emergence of a strong new voice, whether as scholar of African Studies or as herself a new creator of the literature. In her prose, Joyce explores issues of human rights, gender and power, the preservation and sharing of the literary treasures of a culture, and more. In her poetry, she shows a keen awareness of life apprehended through the senses and through the daily rhythms of multiple cultures. She helps her readers see anew, whether on love and loss, living outside one’s homeland, cinematic approaches that reveal but also oversimplify cultural conflicts and genocide, or formation of a literary canon.

She’s a Great Contributor to Campus and Community Life!

Joyce excels in student-centered teaching and service. First of all, she is a dedicated advisor. I have seen the care she takes with her advisees and with students in her classes. She will do all she can to help students make the kinds of turn-arounds for which we hope. I particularly admire her advising that takes place outside the formal structures. Joyce volunteered to launch our Hillyer Summer Bridge weeklong sessions for incoming first-years, which she led for two summers; she ended up a sought-after mentor for those students on through the regular semesters. She created a Black History Month celebration for the university community, “Words Like Trees,” with participants from her classes, who have written that their performance “bought the readings to life.” She mentored students from her honors class “Art on a Mission” to present at the Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium. Such outside-of-class collaboration fosters particularly strong connections of students with their faculty and with their college and university. A brief anecdote along that line: Having earlier offered a moving African blessing for the Shaw Center at a gathering for Hillyer faculty and staff, Joyce was asked to do a poetry reading for the September dedication day. Rather than reading alone, she brought in a drummer from the Hartt School to provide rhythmic accompaniment and some of her students to participate in a call-and-response reading. When one of my own new first-year advisees wandered by, Joyce

invited her in to join the reading; the student did so, then came to visit me afterward saying how excited she was to participate and adding that she hoped to talk further with Joyce and to take a course with her. Whether literally or figuratively, Joyce reaches out to students, always.

Joyce has offered service activities that speak directly to her particular talents and interests—thus her launching of the Hillyer English Summer Bridge program, her creation of the Black History Month celebration, her participation in “Our Campus Creates,” her visits with other department faculty to two area high schools, her guest presentations in other faculty members’ classes, and more. Joyce is also ready and willing to meet the daily, behind-the-scenes service needs. She serves on a standing committee of the college (Awards and Recognition) and on our department assessment committee. Any chair would welcome a department member who is willing to contribute her time and energy in such varied ways. Joyce’s service extends well beyond the university via such activities as her founding of EduArt, an international organization promoting African cultures and cultural change through the arts and offering an annual award for Anglophone Cameroon literature.

Before joining our department, Joyce held a five-year, full-time position as Assistant Professor in Residence at the University of Connecticut, with earlier teaching experience at Bronx Community College of CUNY, so she came to us with teaching experience and scholarship already well underway. Both Robert Tilton, the English department chair at the University of Connecticut at that time, and Gina Barreca had strong praise for her teaching, based on both teaching observations and student evaluations. Tilton includes this telling sentence in his recent letter of strong support for her promotion and tenure: “She was a wonderful ambassador for UConn, for the Hartford campus, and for our English Department.” As I watch Joyce’s interactions, for example with the faculty of Bloomfield High School, and learn of her varied readings and presentations, for example as invited presenter at a Democracy in Action symposium at Wayne State, I see that ambassadorship in action. She will continue to

be a wonderful representative of Hillyer College and the University of Hartford not only across the campus and local communities but nationally and internationally.

She's Great Overall!

Through her teaching, scholarship, and service, Professor Joyce Ashuntantang has earned the designation of tenured Associate Professor of English. As attested by all her outside reviewers, she has already gained recognition for her work and has momentum that promises a bright future. We look forward to working with her in the years ahead, and to her ongoing substantial contributions to our students, the college, the university, and well beyond.

AND—SHE'S A GREAT PERSON! HOORAY, JOYCE!!!

(from Marcia Seabury,
on behalf of the
English Department of
Hillyer College,
University of Hartford)

Notes

