

ADDRESS
by
Her Ladyship
The Honourable Acting Justice of Appeal
Suzie d'Auvergne
delivered at the
Plenary Sitting
of the
Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court
on
Thursday, 21st October, 2004

**

Castries,
Saint Lucia

Honourable Chief Justice, Colleagues, Members of the Inner Bar, Members of the Outer Bar.

I recognise in the audience and note the presence of:

Her Excellency the Governor -General, Dame Calliopa Pearlette Louisy

The Right Honourable Sir Vincent Floissac

Senator the Hon. Calixte George

Hon. Speaker Baden Allain

Lady Gloria Robotham

I am indeed flattered by your kind and generous statements and words of appreciation of my fourteen (14) years of service on the Bench.

I have enjoyed working with you all and if you have found working with me enjoyable and remarkable as you have expressed, it is largely the vicarious effect of your unfailing support and sincere respect throughout my tenure, in addition to the dignified manner you addressed yourselves before me.

The performance of a judge, however brilliant, is largely influenced by the quality and erudition of the advocates and their presentations.

You may be surprised to know that from the time I was a young girl I have been setting goals for myself. At every turn I have endeavoured to attain those goals.

One of my main goals was to become a Barrister at Law. To achieve this end I depended largely on my dear parents for financial and emotional support and encouragement. My father often said to me:

“Perseverance wins the day. Do not give up. Suzie fight to the end. Remember always he who laughs last laughs best. Do not believe for one moment that you can do it without the help of the Almighty”

It was these repeated words of wisdom which inspired me and motivated the hard and arduous work which led to my being called to the Bar at Middle Temple on the 25th November, 1974.

I need not tell you of the trauma of a young woman leaving the Caribbean to study in an environment that was neither socially nor emotionally accommodating as the Caribbean. Those were the days of studying with paraffin heaters as the central heating.

I returned home, as you have heard, and was called to the Bar on the 9th January 1975.

After almost 5 years in private practice I joined the Public Service as a Magistrate. Many colleagues told me that I had taken the wrong turn, for the Magistracy in those days, was regarded as a legal cemetery, and that persons who became Magistrates were doomed to depart this terrestrial life as a Magistrate.

It was this view that spurred me on and immediately I set myself the goal of becoming a High Court Judge, if only to disprove that notion.

There were no female High Court Judges in the OECS at that time. Justice Monica Joseph, the first female High Court Judge of the OECS was elevated to the bench in April 1982.

In parenthesis, I might mention that Justice Brown of Trinidad, now Lady Marshall, residing in Barbados, who was born in Saint Lucia is the first Saint Lucian-born female to become a judge. Many of you here present would not have known her, for she left Saint Lucia after the 1927 fire. It is my understanding that she visited her home land about five years ago.

A few persons have been fortunate to rise from the Magistracy to the High Court Bench but in my case it was different. In 1982, three (3) years after becoming a Magistrate, I was appointed Director of Public Prosecutions, and in 1988 I was appointed Solicitor General.

On the 17th of September, 1990 I attained my goal. I was appointed a High Court Judge. There is no doubt that I was happy. I was a little saddened, however, that my father was not alive to witness the realization of his dream for he had died seven (7) months earlier. Notwithstanding this regret, my mother and my siblings shared with me that moment and the pleasure of this accomplishment.

The older folks in Saint Lucia did not allow me to forget that I was enjoying my father's industry and hard work. Many an elderly person would say to me "where is Sully to see his daughter make hi story in Saint Lucia?" (Just translate this statement in patois).

My next goal was to become an Appellate Judge of the OECS. This, however, turned out to be the most difficult goal of all. But as my dear Papa would say "You made it Suzie by the Grace of God".

This latest appointment is for four (4) months, and ends on the 31st December 2004. However, I am happy to know that it will be recorded in the annals of

Saint Lucian History, however short the period. My memoirs will reveal my personal reflections on this period.

On a lighter note, it has been said that the OECS Court is competing with Hollywood for actors and actresses as acting appointments have, over the past seven (7) years, almost become a norm. The reasons for this are for others to explain, not me.

As for me, acting is not something new to me for in 1965 I had the lead role in the play "Mother Courage" a four (4) hour play directed by Arthur Jacobs and Rody Walcott, the twin brother of the Honourable Derek Walcott.

May I address a few words to you, the female attorneys, in particular, the Saint Lucians. You should remember that in the late 1920s Marie Grace Augustin, the sister of the illustrious Elwin Augustin, was refused admittance to the Saint Lucia Bar because of her gender.

Today, we have many registered female attorneys in Saint Lucia. We have certainly come a long way.

Finally, I want to say thank you to all of you: colleagues, relatives, friends and well-wishers:

(a) I should like to thank the Almighty God for making this day possible—a day which appeared to be a long way off.

(b) I thank my parents: strong, 'firy', argumentative Sullivan and firm, resolute, quiet, and gentle Agnes, for making me who I am. I also thank God that I inherited all their qualities; so that it is so easy for me to be a Sullivan in the morning and an Agnes in the afternoon, or vice versa.

There are a few people to whom I have to say a special thank you. They are as follows:

Firstly, Sir Lascelles Robotham of Blessed Memory, for choosing me from among the many eligible Attorneys and appointed me a Judge.

Secondly, The Right Honourable Sir Vincent Floissac for his advice and kindness. Sir Vincent may not remember and I quote " Suzie, as long as I am Chief Justice and your mother is ailing I will not transfer you out of Saint Lucia, as it would be nothing short of an injustice " .

I thank the Right Honourable Sir Dennis Byron for allowing me to remain in Saint Lucia until the passing of my sick mother and sister, and for providing me with the wonderful opportunity of serving in Tortola, British Virgin Islands.

I thank Mr. Kenneth Monplaisir Q.C., my first employer, and Mr. Albert Hinkson of Blessed memory for all they taught me in the early days.

Mr. Desmond McNamara Q.C., Deceased Winston Cennac Q.C., Deceased Henry Girardy Q.C. : for all the advice given to me.

I thank Mr. Parry Husbands Q.C. with whom I worked As Solicitor General; Mr. Kenneth Foster Q.C., who was of tremendous assistance when I became Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Foster assisted me during the period of preparation for my 1st Assizes in October 1982. He assisted me to his detriment. I used the same cases he directed me to, against him. D.P.P's Dane Hammilton, Mr. Errol Walker and Miss Victoria Charles. The Registrars who worked with me; in particular, Mrs. Andra

Foster and Miss Sonia Young, Registrar of the British Virgin Islands; My many Secretaries, particularly Mrs. Yvonne Greenidge, Mrs. Sonia Augustin Monrose, Miss Janet Anthony; the Court Interpreters, Mr. Charlery and Mr. Gilbert Germain; Miss Anne Marie Smith, my Judicial Assistant who worked closely with me in Tortola, now a Magistrate in St. Lucia; Court Orderly, Isembert and Driver Vincent Jn. Louis who both worked with me for the entire 11 years I served as a Judge in St. Lucia; my Office Attendant, Loretta Henry of the Director of Public Prosecution's Office.

I wish to thank the Saint Lucia Bar Association and, in particular, the Officers who worked so hard at such short notice to put on this Plenary Session.

Thank you all. I will miss you, however, I am not going into hibernation. I will be in Saint Lucia, and will certainly meet you and interact with you.

In conclusion, my years of experience on the Bench have led me to the conclusion that our profession is in a period of crisis. The image of lawyers and the Judiciary in general have dropped below the level of esteem and admiration which our people had for us.

In addition, there is ample evidence that the courtesies which existed amongst lawyers in the past years are gradually disappearing. It is not surprising that there is so much suspicion and doubt about the Caribbean Court of Justice. It is for us to ensure that our conduct and behaviour are worthy of the high calling of the profession to which we belong.

I thank you for listening.