

A Full Life

Salatu Sule



*(In memory of Aisha Bridget-Anne Lemu née Honey:
Oct 14 1940 – Jan 05 2019)*

I can't remember the exact moment I met Hajia, as she was generally known on the I.E.T. compound, but quite a long time before then I had met her through her books. I was in primary school when I stumbled upon the book on seerah which was in my dad's collection of books in his room. I was bored and had nothing else to do so I sat down on the prayer rug in my dad's room and was soon lost in the story of a man whose father died before he was born and whose mother passed away when he was only six. There were sketches in the book which made me, sitting there in my dad's room with the book open before me, try to imagine what a caravan of camels was like and how it felt to travel through the desert. This book on seerah was my first encounter with the history of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

When I started working with New Horizons College, she introduced me to Islamic Perspectives, a subject she designed; she checked my lesson plans when I just started teaching and showed me how to do it well. She asked me to join another teacher in managing the Singing Club; she would come for rehearsals and give feedback on how well the students were singing. She also taught us a Chinese song; I still see the transliteration in her distinct handwriting. I have many such pictures in my mental slide-show of Hajia: Hajia striding down the school block corridor; sitting quietly in a corner of the class observing a teacher at work; attending staff meetings; planning major school events such as the Speech and Prize Day, Inter-house sports, entrance examinations and Open Day; sitting together at the eid prayer ground; exchanging greetings in French or German, Hajia correcting my pronunciation of 'Je', the French word for 'I'.



Later on, I became her daughter-in-law. She was still 'Hajia' to me, then in the last month of her life, she became 'mummy'. From these later years, I have images of Hajia chatting with family during family lunch on Sundays; greeting 'eid mubarak' on the morning of eid day; enjoying the games put up by the family at the eid evening party in her sitting room; Hajia baking cookies in her kitchen; Hajia chatting with me about life, the school, books and movies in her room or on her back verandah; driving to the supermarket; planning for the weekend literacy programme for almajirai and children from economically disadvantaged homes which she initiated; saying to someone she disagreed with 'Na lie...' with a mischievous smile because she didn't speak Pidgin and 'Na lie' said in her British accent was very funny; dancing with her daughters i.e. her daughter-by-birth and the women who loved her and so became her 'daughters'; sitting under the mango tree in her back garden admiring the splash of colour from flowers in bloom...so many memories of a life beautifully lived.



A lot of her activities slowed down in the last few years but the years of health, vigour and work far exceed those of old age and illness, especially in terms of the full-heartedness of her efforts. This always calls to my mind the hadith *'Take advantage of five before five: your **youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your free time before your preoccupation, your wealth before your poverty and your life before your death.**'*

She was a gentle and humble person, persistent when something good needed to be done, believing in possibilities, ready to let people dream big and try new things. She had a full life, enriched by her positive actions and beautiful character. She was a beautiful human being.

May Allah's light and blessings be upon her.