

Tribute to Glory

Over the past week Maithrie and I have been incredibly moved by stories of how people's lives were touched by Glory. I'll start with one such message:

“Right now I can think of no better a person than Glory White, when I think of her character, determination and intellect. Her moral fibre, trueness and commitment to others in teaching us all. She never stopped teaching. Things I will never forget. Glory's faith and strength has always inspired me, to be a Christian like her, to be peace making, brave, loving, kind, after Glory's example. I will miss Glory so much, a long life, always lived in the same direction”

Glory was the only parent Maithrie knew — her father, Douglas, died when she was a baby. Glory drew from her gifts and imagination to give Maithrie an amazing childhood, filling her life with poetry, magical tales, beauty, and many amazing journeys: a trip to see the Astronauts when they came to Sri Lanka, and spectacular train journeys to the central province, when she learned the names of the mountains.

The family was close-knit, with some of Glory's sisters living in the same house, or in neighbouring houses, over the years. The children called her Glory Mama, but her grand nephew called her “Go” — and the name stuck.

Glory was a gifted and accomplished lady — she loved poetry, and wrote poems and stories herself. She won awards for art, and she played Piano, Violin, and Classical Guitar. She spoke four languages, including Latin. She read voraciously — from War and Peace (twice), to Shakespeare (she and her husband shared a copy of the complete works, and they ticked off the plays as they read them). She was a fan of Monty Python. And when Glory came to the UK, she loved to watch “Last of the Summer Wine.” She found Compo's antics with Nora Batty hilarious — though she tutted furiously if characters in films and soaps even kissed.

Glory met and married Douglas while they were both in the probation service. She worked with the Salvation Army and Orphanages to help children. So she wanted to support charities working with children and the vulnerable.

After Douglas died, Glory went to University and studied English, Geography and Economics, then English Lit for a masters, before teaching in Wesley College, Colombo. She loved her pupils, and though she was strict, she was very caring. Once she saw the boys reaching into their desks and surreptitiously sneaking lunch. She realised they hadn't had time for breakfast, and declared a

ten minute break so they could eat — she knew they couldn't concentrate otherwise. We still receive calls on WhatsApp from burly, bearded, former pupils, who remember her fondly, and ask to speak to "Teacher." One, whom she'd banned from drumming on his desk, proudly told her he was now a drummer at one of Colombo's leading hotels.

She taught for a while in the Maldives, where she learned to ride a bicycle, until illness forced her back to Sri Lanka, where she trained new teachers.

Glory had a difficult life. She lost her husband. She lived through three terrible periods of ethnic violence — but never gave in to hatred. When a mob came to burn Tamil homes, she told her sisters and Tamil neighbours to stand their ground — or they would lose everything. With a knife at her throat, she denied they were Tamils. "Would we still be here if we were Tamil?" she demanded in Sinhalese. And she saved the houses, and probably the lives of her family and neighbours.

For many years, Glory had nightmares about those times — nightly, she screamed in her sleep. But recently we realised that the nightmares had gradually stopped. Living here gave her space to heal, and worshipping here helped her rebuild her faith in God.

I first met Glory when she came to Nottingham for Maithrie's graduation. A friend of ours was fishing for information, and asked Glory what she thought of me. Glory, replied with an old rhyme — "Flowers in the spring time, apples in the fall, I don't care what mother says, I'm going to marry Paul!"

During this visit to the UK, my mum and dad invited Glory and Maithrie (and me) to join them for a holiday in Scotland. They got along famously, and chaperoned Maithrie and me within an inch of our lives. Glory is an early bird, and my mum doesn't sleep till late, so we only had an hour or two on any given day. But both my parents welcomed Glory and Maithrie into the family, and Glory really loved them. Once, after a long walk, mummy brought Glory a bowl of water to soak her feet. She was so touched.

Glory lived with us in Belfast after our wedding. She was wonderful, giving us our space, cooking us curries, and only occasionally offering to stitch up Maithrie's blouses because she thought they were too low cut (they weren't). I think Glory had forgotten how *she'd* scandalised her own mum by wearing western dresses instead of Sarees. In rows, Glory always sided with me. Maithrie complained that I was the son, and she the daughter-in-law.

Glory kept up to date — not just with Sri Lankan politics via the internet, Al Jazeera, and other media — but also with UK and NI politics. In fact she often kept *us* up to date.

Glory was a perfectionist. When Maithrie wrote to her from Nottingham, Glory sent the letters back — with corrections in red. Maithrie had to threaten to stop writing! And this year, when Glory was teaching Maithrie to knit, she used to undo it all if Maithrie dropped any stitches!

Glory is strong, says my mum. She's right. Glory knew her own mind. She stopped doing what *I* said fairly quickly, and she *never* did what Maithrie told her. In fact the look she gave Maithrie when she *tried* became famous — even in the hospital ward.

It was not easy to get her to do what she didn't want — but Gail, her physiotherapist, unfailingly persuaded her to stand up, breathe deeply, march on the spot, and walk up and down. The strength that Glory regained in these last few months really enhanced her life, and she joined us again at the table for meals, under her own steam.

For someone who never liked going out, Glory bonded with many people. She always asked her carers their names, and noted them down. Some are here today — thank you for all you did, Ciara, Kelly, Carol, and so many more.

Maithrie says her mum sacrificed so much to get her where she is today. She never remarried (not for want of offers). She studied late into the night to become a teacher, to support them both. She gave Maithrie a *love* for study, and invested her savings in Maithrie's education. Maithrie, and I, will be eternally grateful.

Decades ago in Sri Lanka, in a society where servants or tradespeople were expected to sit outside on a doorstep, Glory invited them into her home, and served them cups of tea. She stayed in touch with many of them. She truly believed in the dignity of human beings. She cared for people.

Glory touched so many lives, and made them better. Some of you are with us today. Some — especially her family in Sri Lanka — could not come to say goodbye. So I would like [Mark] to read short extracts from a few of the messages they sent instead, as their goodbye.

I have shortened them. Please forgive me.

Jeevan:

I can't imagine a world without Go in it. I know what I believe and I know what my faith tells me... But wherever I go when my time comes, my only prayer is that it is where Go is. Because I know my Nana will be there too. Everything else I want to say would take pages. But this is all that matters.

Enoka:

'Go' taught me about becoming a "big girl and about how a girl grows up" She used to... tell me lots of stories...

During the 1979 riots I was in Katu *gas* tota. Go was so afraid when the mobs stoned the house. But Go still huddled all of us in the middle room... and kept us safe while re-assuring us that everything is ok...

Jesus sent this angel called 'Go' into this world for a definite meaning and purpose and 'Go' most certainly lived to that plan...

Farewell darling 'Go'... we will miss you and your beautiful smile.

Shani:

at age 8 we stayed with 4 of my aunties. I went in the school bus with Glory mama as she was a teacher at the same school... I would visit her in the staff room to get cash for the tuckshop... 10 years later... I moved to stay with Glory mama, aunty Leila and Maithrie ...as I found it very difficult to study at home... every night Glory mama would bring a hot [drink...] when I was studying... I will miss you Glory mama. I love you.

Shani

Radheeka:

Glory mama, thank you for being my second Mama. After my Mama died, you put your arm round me and told me, "Darling don't worry I will be your Mama from now..." You made me feel loved and special... We used to have long chats in the nights, laugh a lot... All these little things you and I did helped me to get back my life again after Mama died . Thank you for being my second Mama...

Dinusha:

I still have the Letter GO sent me when i lost my husband...it lifted me up. Many sympathised and visited me and cared materially too. But [Glory Mama] surpassed all those sympathies. I STILL HOLD that letter 12 years [later]... it comforts me still. ...she knew my pain well, with her experience...

GO you had a beautiful smile...

Thankyou my dear Aunty ...you are safe.... love Dinusha