

Opinion

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers

— Lord Alfred Tennyson, English poet (1809 – 1892)



A READING GARDEN HONOURS PROSPECT PRIMARY SWEETHEART CAROL SMITH

A TRIBUTE:

BY STACEE SMITH



To know her was to love her



A good and beautiful person: A reading garden is dedicated to the loving memory of Carol Smith, also pictured in the top photograph

Not everyone has the privilege of being birthed and raised by a lady as special as my Mother, Carol Smith. Before she passed on October 24, 2009, I was lucky enough to receive warm teddy bear hugs on a regular basis and an abundance of her overflowing love, which burst out of every giggle, howl of laughter and this musing smile.

We were best friends and her confidence, strength and wisdom has given me an excellent foundation on which to navigate life's hurdles because I know my worth. I am Carol's daughter, after all.

My lovely Mommy filled her life with so much fun, humour and happiness that her aura gave anyone in her presence a renewed sense of vivacity. Her outgoing and genuine spirit was uniquely magnetic and sweeter than the fluffiest stick of cotton candy. It is for these reasons and her joy of reading, that a reading garden was recently dedicated in her honour at Prospect Primary School, where she was the Administrative Assistant for 21 years (1988-2009) until she fell ill.

In addition to the countless individuals whose hearts she touched throughout the island and beyond, there are current and former students, parents of students and staff members of Prospect Primary School, who know exactly what I mean when I describe her. My Mom enjoyed her job at Prospect and loved bonding with the children and staff members. As former Prospect Primary School teacher John Duncan fondly reminisced, although "Aunt Carol" (as she was affectionately known by many of her colleagues) was an administrative assistant, "her role was broader than her professional job, as she was a mother to both the children and the staff members with whom she worked," and "she would go beyond her capacity of duty to serve or help in any capacity."

When John met my Mom upon beginning his teaching career at the school in 1989 he said "immediately I was drawn to her luminous smile, genuine disposition, and benevolent character. It was at that time that I knew we would become lifelong friends."

Twenty-one year old Chioma Nwankwo, who is currently studying Biology with a Spanish minor at Dalhousie University (Canada), is a former student of Prospect Primary.

"When I think of Mrs. Smith, I am immediately reminded of her smile and how her warm and bubbly disposition influenced me at such a young age," she said.

"I met Mrs. Smith when I started school at Prospect Primary, she was the secretary but was always so much more to all of us who attended school there. I would spend my lunch hours with her, until she had taught me enough to leave me alone so that she could have a break."

"She appointed me Office Helper of the year and presented me with a plaque at my graduation, which I cherish dearly. Mrs. Smith's death has motivated me as I pursue a medical career to provide quality health care for all. I am blessed that God allowed our paths to cross and I will remember her always. She is truly missed, and may she continue to rest peacefully. Not all good people are not always good, but kind people are always beautiful. Mrs. Smith was definitely both!"

Further illustrating her innate ability to connect with children is Patricia Castle, who was also a student at the school.

"Mrs. Smith was always in a cheerful mood," he said. "Every time I would see her she smiled. One day I went to her office and she thought I was in trouble, so I said 'No I just came to say hi to you' and she smiled followed by her laughter. I will always remember Mrs. Smith by her loving smile." Patricia is now 26 and studied Sports Management at Holland College (Canada).

Alberta Dyer-Tucker taught at Prospect Primary, and has many fond memories of my Mom.

"Sometimes in life you find kindred spirits; people you never grew up with but who you 'click' when you meet them. Carol Smith was one of those persons in

my life. I didn't know her before working with her at Prospect Primary School, but you would think that we had known each other for decades! We shared jokes, grumbles, food, the whole nine yards! If I wanted an opinion on something, I went to Carol. She would be agreeable and even if I didn't have it 'just right she would talk me through my brilliant plan, listening with pure fascination, and actually cause me to rethink mid-sentence until I came up with something even better. She made me feel special, and that's not something that just anyone can do! No one could draw my name like Carol! 'Buuur-ta girl!' (Followed by a giggle). I can hear her in my heart."

"Carol was warm, nurturing and genuine – qualities that are not in great supply nowadays. Even when we were both frustrated by the administration of the day and I would come to the office in a foul mood, she would always find a way to make me feel better, even if she was a bit frustrated herself! A little giggle, a little joke about what we would do if we were in charge and wham! She helped me out of my funk! Carol's kindness and authenticity (she was who she was and never tried to be anyone else) endeared her to everyone. She had a warm place in her heart for each student and staff member and in turn, she was loved by each of us. Although she may never have said it out loud, Carol had the unique ability to connect with everyone and let you know she cared. Prospect Primary and our collective lives were all the richer because we met Carol Smith!"

Two former teachers who also loved my Mom to pieces are Verana Wilkinson and Shabolli Basden, and they described her as a prime example of what a Christian should be.

Shabolli, who affectionately referred to her as "my passion flower," said "Aunt Carol personified excellence! Her personality encapsulated humility and servanthood. She was a godly woman who articulated with grace and a wide-eyed smile. She was approachable, confidential and committed every concern to prayer."

Verana remembers praying with my Mom in her office on many occasions, and feeling such a sense of reassurance as everything all ways worked out just as she told her it would.

"She was a mother figure to me and she always put my attitude 'in check' in such a gentle way," Verana said. "She was one person that made the time to listen to anyone that needed to be listened to, even if it meant that later on Mr. Smith would be outside waiting because she is trying to finish the work that she should have been doing earlier, but she was listening to someone vent about something that happened," she chuckled. Verana also said my Mom always made sure that she had requested the office supplies that she "needed and not just what I wanted", handed in any paperwork on time and "did not allow me to find any excuse of why I did not get it in."

Although everyone seemed to have their own name for my Mom, Verana still called her "Mrs. Smith," "because she was such a lady, even with that laugh," she added. "Any one that knew Mrs. Smith at Prospect Primary did not just know her as the school secretary. They knew her as a Mother, a mentor and a Christ-like person. To know her was to love her. Much love always Mrs. Smith!"

Also very close to my Mom was former Prospect Primary teacher Antoinette Outbridge who said: "Mrs. Smith was like a breath of fresh air once you came into the office. She always had a smile on her face or a laugh to share with you."

"I will never forget how much she liked to laugh and have fun. Her laugh was really loud and you could not help but laugh with her even when things should have been quiet."

"I loved to stop by the office and share different things with her and when it was something really interesting she would always say 'stop ya noise Any!' and 'don't make me holla.' She was the kind of person that you could rely on and she did an excellent job as secretary at Prospect Primary. Whenever I think of Mrs. Smith a smile always comes to my face as she was one of the most pleasant, funny, charming and most caring individuals I have had the pleasure to work with."

My Mom had such a positive impact on the staff members at Prospect Primary that some of them, like former teachers Lara Ingham and Vanessa Boyles-Steele, have a picture of her in their home that they look at each day.

"Your Mom meant a lot to me," said Vanessa. "I have an 8x10 picture of her in my living room."

Her radiance did not go unnoticed by parents either, as they recognised the special role she played while their children attended the school. Cornell Castle Sr., father of

former students Patricia and Cornell Jr., is one of them.

"I knew Carol through our association with North Village Community Club and therefore when the boys started at Prospect Primary it was like an extension of family. I guess lots of parents felt that way. She was always cheerful and had nothing but positive things to say about their behaviour and the friends they kept at school."

His wife Patricia-Ann echoed his sentiments, adding "Carol Smith's smiling face made approaching her very easy. Her professionalism and guidance was always extremely beneficial."

As former Prospect Primary School teacher and principal O'Brien Osborne said, my Mother's affable spirit "helped to create the warm and welcoming environment for which Prospect Primary School was known."

He recalls many occasions when my Mom would share laughs with him or former principals Martha Francis and Marva Outbridge in her office, jokingly telling them to leave her alone so she could get her work done.

"As current Assistant Director of Education Mrs. Terry Cox would say: 'Look at Aunt Carol! Isn't she precious?' Yes, she was precious!" The ceremony for the official opening and dedication of the "Carol Smith Reading Garden" – tranquilly located at the south-western corner of the school – was held on Thursday May 21, 2015, and the weather was perfect.

Marie Furbert (former teacher and counsellor at the school) said of the ceremony: "The dedication of the new reading garden at Prospect Primary in honour of Carol Smith was a wonderful tribute to the friend I will always remember as a rare ray of sunshine. Her ready smile, pleasant demeanour and words of wisdom brightened every school day. What a joy it was to have known Carol and to reflect on this friend I will cherish all my days. She was very, very special."

I would like to thank the late Martha Francis (former principal of Prospect Primary) who hired my Mom in 1988 and developed a special bond with her throughout their years working together.

I would also like to thank the current administrative assistant Phillis Butterfield who helped to organise the official opening ceremony and participants in the ceremony: current principal Dr. Shantri-La Durham-Thompson, deputy principal Kenneth Smith, teachers Deanna Deschield and Cecil O'Connor (current staff members who also worked with my Mom), Pastor Paul Richards, Minister Walter Roban JP, MP and Rev Dr. Maria Seaman.

Let me thank you very much to everyone who assisted with planning the event and creating or sponsoring the garden, as well as the many friends, family, students and staff members who attended the ceremony.

To honour my Mom in such a special way means so much to my Dad, brothers and I, as well as my Granny and the rest of my family.

We really appreciate it and I'm sure she is glowing and tickled pink up there in heaven!

My beautiful Mother was not only Prospect Primary's sweetheart, she was an angel on earth.



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Further illustrating her innate ability to connect with children is Patraic Castle, who was also a student at the school.

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