

Hannah Iris Ahmed nee Palmer: A Matriarch in law sleeps on...

By Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah (Mentee and a son in the law)

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The year was 2011 and there I was a legal neophyte before Magistrate Shyllon to represent some clients on the instructions of my pupil master. The counsel for the other party was Mrs. Hannah I. Ahmed. I didn't know I was being fed to the wolves by my pupil master until Mrs. Ahmed stood up to address the court with her uniquely sublime traverse of the language of the court, which metaphorically elevates her modest vertical structure. Afterwards, every time I attempted to speak on behalf of my clients, I was drowned out with objections by H. I. Ahmed who had caught my admiration more than my opposition. With paralyzing embarrassment, my legs wobbled as my tongue desiccated every time I stood up. Later that day, the clients reported my dismal performance to my pupil master in my presence and I won't forget when they pleaded with him never to send me to represent them in the matter since I could not match the eloquence and legal aptitude of H. I. Ahmed. For them that day "I was a buff lawyer". While I didn't like the feedback, I was secretly happy to be removed from the harm's way of a heavy-weight lawyer. Few years later, our paths crossed again when we handled a matter on either side between a couple in the High Court. By then many things had happened to my legal career. I had fully incubated, shed off my rookie feathers and attained full throttle, fearlessness, and fierceness in my legal practice. We went toe-to-toe in that matter and in addition to securing a partial win I also won the admiration and heart of Mamie Ahmed. And that was how our relationship akin to a mother and son started.

Over the years, our relationship grew deeper and stronger. She would send many of her clients to me as if I were an adjunct in her practice. In our firm, she was known as the invisible managing partner. Everyone including our interns knew that Mamie Ahmed's work (always in hand-written instructions or draft) should take precedence. When she took ill in November after her accident, our entire firm went to visit her at the Westend clinic because she was not just another lawyer, she had become a part and parcel of our firm. We communicated on a daily basis. She would always repeat her advice to me to take a spoon of blood tonic (and her recommended brand was Bell's) and a word of prayer before I sleep. That was her swansong every time we speak in the evening or at night. We would discuss her cases and would request my help with research, like she would Osman Jalloh and other colleagues. I remember a particular case she did in the High Court last year in which she had a pretty hard time with the judge. She called to discuss it and after bouncing off strategy with me, she said to me she would pray about it. And that was Mamie Ahmed—she was a woman of prayer. If she is not doing her legal work, she is listening to Pastor Mambu or attending service. All of her cases were done with prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit. She would always speak about Christ Jesus or the Holy Spirit as if she had just fallen in love with them. In that particular matter, on the day she was meant to cross-examine the star witness for the other party, she had consulted with the Holy Spirit and had prayed specifically for help to overcome the seeming bias of the judge. Later that day, she called me jubilantly saying that the Holy Spirit gave her the right questions to demolish the witness. Even the judge, she

told me, could not contain his apparent sway after her cross-examination. Few months later, the judgment was out and she won the case. For Mamie Ahmed, that was not her doing, it was work of her darling Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Mamie Ahmed like most of her generation was a stickler for ethics. As someone who witnessed the heydays of our country's legal system, she would quickly point out the decline in both the administration and adjudication of justice. She would scold lawyers, litigants and court officials for any conduct which in her opinion undercuts the integrity of the court whether in sanitation, justice or even optics. I remember when we had the infamous bar association meeting and a snippet of video emerged of me appearing to strut on the desks of the court, she did not spare me the characteristic forthrightness of her counsel. That was Mamie Ahmed, she loved and chastised me in good measure.

Mamie Ahmed and I last spoke in December before I left for the holidays. On the very day she passed away, I went to a mall to pick up some items, and I saw her favorite chocolate, which I'd always gift her when I return from trips and subtly reminded myself to get some from duty-free the next day while returning. But there was no next day from her as I woke to the news of her passing. It stung me because I often teased her about not being able to speak to her while away since she was not on WhatsApp, and she responded that she would learn this year how to use social media.

H. I. Ahmed was not just a senior lawyer, she was the first female president of the Sierra Leone Bar Association and until her demise the oldest practising female lawyer. She was a quintessential lawyer, adroit in advocacy, uncompromising in ethics and a spirit-filled and God-loving person. She has gone to meet her darling Jesus and to sup in eternal banquet with her confidant, the Holy Spirit.

I will miss her dearly. She had become a great part of my life and legal career. She had exemplified to me the best of ethics and shown me what spiritual lawyering is. Please sleep on and enjoy your rest, Mamie Ahmed. From myself, the other partners, associates, and staff at Marrah & Associates.