



## **Tribute to My Sweet Mother Mama Lydia Angang Achua From Dr Esther Ken Gwan**

My first memories about mama are vague but I definitely remember the first time I noticed her in my life. We were on a farm in Ntamukwei. When the rain will be coming our way, she would tell me to start running towards the hut and she would catch up with me. That was my first vague memory. Of all the people around me, she was the one taking care of me and will always hold my hand and lead me home at the end of the day. I must have been about 4 years old because I was not yet going to school at the time.

Through the years, I learnt a lot from this amazing woman. We called her Mami or Mama. Other people called her Mangang or Abu Kien after her children.

### **Mama Could Read and Write the Signs of Times**

She was not literate, but she knew education was the key to success. Her own efforts to educate herself in adult school led to the ability to sign her name with a cross or an x otherwise it was a thumb mark on her legal documents. Notwithstanding, she influenced all her 9 children to at least complete primary or elementary school. My father's highest salary was 9000 FRS a month at the time of his retirement. That was not enough to feed the family. So mami did what she could to supplement the family income and allow the cash that came in to go for education. Today all her 9 children (8 surviving her) are literate. Her 40 grand children all read and write and her 35 great grand children will follow the footsteps of their parents.

### **Mami Invested Wisely**

I remember I needed 400 FRS to register for the Common Entrance Exam in 1967. Mami spent the night cooking yams and koki beans. In the morning, she put one basin of food on my head, and carried one. We went down to the cross road between Mandankwe and Ndzah at Fenyongoup. The Ndzah people were digging the road with their hands at the time. People from Babanki, Banjah, and Mandankwe bought food from us. When we had sold for 400FRS, she put the money in my hands, closed it tightly and told me to run to school to pay for my exam fees. My hand was my purse and no one ever dared tell mami that you lost money.

### **She Was an Entrepreneur**

As long as I can remember, mami was always selling something to supplement the family income. She took me to Bamenda station market where we will sell cooked corn, or beans, then buy soap and cooking oil and head home on foot. She took me

to the Bamenda old market where I looked starry eyed at shops full of new clothes, and will sit with her in the crowds to sell firewood or vegetables. She taught me how to count the British pennies and pounds until they were replaced by the Franc with a parity of 692 francs to a pound. I lived through history with her without realizing what a phenomenal change was taking place.

### **She Had an Amazing Memory**

She knew about the Second World War and would tell us stories she had heard about brave soldiers. I saw the British families living in Bamenda station in what I thought were the most beautiful houses. She told me they were all called "Allo Joes" and I never understood why until later in life. When the British left, those houses were occupied by black people who rode in Land Rovers. Mami told me those were "Black White People" and I believed her. One day I saw pa Bell Ndingsa living in one of those houses. I asked her if pa Bell was a "black white man" and she said yes without batting an eye and I believed her.

### **Independence Day Celebration**

Mami took me to the Agric Show Field on Independence Day and I was totally blown away by all the shows I saw. I did not understand at the time, but this was actually the Nigerian Independence Day celebration. The event took place outside Bamenda Station outside all the houses at the grounds below pa Jing's compound. It was a stadium at the time with a grand stand. The horses were dressed in colorful clothes. The riders each wore large swaddling clothes, with a turban on their head. The skillful drummers were singing the praises of "Abubakar Tafawa Balawa". Historically this was 1960 and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balawa was the first Nigerian Prime Minister from 1960 until his assassination in 1966. Again, I was living history in her company without realizing it.

### **Mami Was a Seamstress**

Mama learned how to sew from Mrs. Ntonifor. I would go down to town on foot with her. We would sell the firewood or vegetables or cocoyams we brought, and she will spend the day learning how to cut material and stitch into a dress. I could not understand at the time or even now how she succeeded without being able to read numbers. But she eventually graduated from sewing school and brought home a brand new Singer Machine. Her husband had paid cash for that hand machine. It was the most valuable thing we had in our house. I do not know if she ever got a return on that investment. Other women also learned to sew in our small village so the demand for her skills was rather low.





## **Mami Was a wonderful Story Teller**

Mami would tell us all kinds of fairy tales around the three stone fireplaces in the night. We would all sit around her and listen until we fell asleep one by one. The stories were clearly fairy tales she had learned as she grew up, but each story had a morale she always concluded with. There were stories encouraging us to always be helpful to others. She told stories that illustrated how greed can destroy people. She told stories that showed how wickedness would always come back and destroy those who had evil intentions towards other people. She told stories that illustrated how patience and hard work always paid back with good things. Many times she did not complete the story in one night and there was a good reason for that.

## **Mami was a Great Teacher**

My mom and her whole family settled outside the village of their birth. They came from Mundum and settled in Banjah with family members that had been separated decades before, the Ndingsas and the Nkwentis. Mami told me the fascinating story of that separation, but it will have to wait for another occasion.

So she grew up speaking one language and was bringing up her children speaking another language. When she told us stories, she would tell them in her language of origin. In the beginning it was difficult to understand but with her translations here and there, we were not only enjoying her stories but actually learning her mother tongue.

To the last breathe; when I call her, she spoke to me in her native maternal tongue. Subtly, without much stress, she taught us a language we did not know before. She also taught us to distinguish between the languages around us, Bambili, Mandankwe, Babanki, Nkwen, Bafut, Mankon, etc. At one time I could speak and distinguish 8 languages all because of her influence.

## **Mami Had the Power of Persuasion**

During the beans or corn season mami will bring home what she had harvested. We had to peel the beans or remove the corn from the cobs before they were cooked. We children liked to eat, but no one really wanted to do the hard work. So mami will volunteer to complete a story she started the day before and everyone will be interested. So she gave a portion of the work to each person to be doing while she completed the story or started a new one. As we peeled the beans she would tell the stories. Interestingly, the story did not end until the work was finished or we had all fallen asleep. And while we slept, she stayed awake to cook. The next morning everyone had corn-chaff to eat before going to school!!

### **She was the Family Disciplinarian**

The cane did not depart too far from her hand. And she used it frequently to keep us on the straight and narrow path. Our daddy was more of a moral talker who loved his children to a fault.

When we were growing up, women and children were not supposed to eat chicken. But daddy will buy a chicken or make us catch one from the ones we were growing. Mami will prepare it very nicely and give a plate to each child to serve him everything in his own house usually in the evening.

We will all gather around him and watch him eat. Some of us will be crying because mami is telling him that she had beaten us up and why. Daddy will pass a piece of chicken in the dark to us and to mami while addressing the issue. He will plead with us children, calling us by nicknames, and telling us we are his hope and should not disappoint him. He talked until we understood enough and cried in remorse over what we have done. An apology was always in the form of a promise to not do it again. Daddy never used the cane on any child which may explain why to this day, I cannot hurt a fly.

### **Mami Was Very Open Minded**

Her first few children had boring names like Grace, Esther, Solomon, Mary etc. She had two baby girls after I went to Saker. Each time she will not name the baby until I came home. So she will ask me all the new names I had heard in Saker, analyze each of them and name her baby by the name she liked the most. Consequently, I have one sister named Miranda after the name Miranda Bell who was a form five student when I was a fox. Another sister is named Gema, after Gema Ntungwen whose name also caught my mother's fancy and allowed her the grace to upgrade the names of her children.

### **Mami Was a Very Spiritual Woman**

Every human being has both strengths and weaknesses. My mother was a very spiritual woman. She was a Presbyterian. My father was a Muslim. He had converted to Islam when he lived in Nigeria with her aunt. He went to church four times a year to please his wife: Christmas Day, New Years Day, Harvest Thanksgiving and whenever any of his children were presented to church or baptized. At the age of 19, as a first year student in the university, I learnt about salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I confessed my sins to God, asked for forgiveness, and invited the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart to be my Lord and Savior. Then I headed home over the holidays to tell my parents what I had done.

I was surprised how attentively they listened to me. They both questioned me at length and I answered them as truthfully as I could. To my greatest joy, they both



decided to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It was my greatest privilege to lead them to a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Mami obeyed the Lord and got baptized by immersion and was an active member and elder of the Presbyterian Church to the day of her death. Even in the Hospital, pastors came preaching the gospel to her, and her tender heart kept saying YES to the invitation of Christ to her last breathe.

### **Divine Visitations**

One story she told me and remembered vividly to the day of her death is about a divine visitation she had when I was a baby. She was so sick she became confused and did not know where the baby was. Her husband was out working hospital shifts, so sometimes he would close at 11 pm in Bamenda General Hospital and walk back to the village getting home around 3 am. So she was often alone.

One night, she thought she was going to die. She would hear the baby crying but did not know how to find the baby because she was so sick and so confused.

Then suddenly, there was a bright light in her village house. The door opened and someone in dazzling white came in. Without saying a word, he stood at the foot of her bed, stretched his hands over the bed and prayed for her. Then he turned around, walked out the door, closed the door behind him and disappeared.

From that moment she got well, and was able to nurse her baby. When I reminded her a few weeks ago as she lay dying in the hospital, she remembered the story as if it just happened. All through her life she told me that one prayer by the divine visitor is what kept her alive so long and so healthy throughout her life.

### **Appointment with Eternity**

My mother was very acquainted with grief. As a child, I saw her mourn for her brothers, Yohannes Ngwendong, and Wilson Ndifor. I saw her grief for her brother-in-law, Samson Singsah. I saw her weep for her husband, Ben Achua, and later her mother-in-law, the very beautiful Rebecca Masanda. Then Pa Denis Ngu and his wife went, and Pa Peter and Ma Rose followed and their children John Achosah, and Simon Ngu. Those were her close family members. As an adult, I saw her mourn for her sisters, Mami Kumba, and Mami Esther Ache. Recently, she buried her brother Robert Ngoh, and less than a year ago, her son Abenego Fon. Mami has seen everyone in her village pass on and seen a new generation grow and take their place as adults and old men and pass on. She has children, grand children and great grand children. I know she knew the end was near for her.

The last years of her life were spent blessing all who came around her. God blessed her with a solid strong body that did not wear out to the last day. Consequently, we were all not prepared for her to transition into eternity after such a short illness.

But her time did come, and she saw departed loved ones welcoming her while she was in the hospital. She spent her nights talking to them.

One grievous part of her departure is the fact that she kept asking for the whereabouts of one family member. This family member resisted the gospel all her life and did not want to have anything to do with Jesus. Other family members who believed and died even in their weaknesses were there to receive her.

Heaven is real. Hell is also real. I hope those listening will answer the call of Jesus and turn to Him for salvation.

God bless you all.

**It is appointed** for **men once** to **die** and after this the judgment. Death is **appointed**, and you are no exception. You only **die once**, and death is not the end; it is your destiny's door.

Mama Lydia has passed through the gates of splendor into her eternal destiny. And you? Where will you spend eternity?

### **A Word for the Living**

If you are privileged to have a parent, take care of them. We took care of mami when she was alive. We have absolutely no regrets about her departure. She lived her full lifespan then slept in the Lord and we will one day see her, but she cannot come back to us unless God in His infinite wisdom decides so.

