

MEMORIAL TRIBUTE

Emmaus Centre
Saint Augustine's College
June 21, 2011 (7:30 p.m.)

Dear friends,

John's daughter Jerusa has asked me to read this tribute on her behalf....

In Memory of John Vincent Dean, My Father

My father was for many, including myself, a source of guidance. That guidance began for me when we lived on a farm in rural Ontario, Canada. On the farm my father taught me how to build a pigeon trap, to make a kite and to carve a wooden top. These, he said, were the kinds of things that he made as a child in the Bahamas with his brothers Anthony and Jerome. He told me with pride that in his family there were no birthdays and no shiny new toys. As I grew older, my father still preferred to give me wooden toys as gifts. A wooden abacus, a wooden xylophone—these were my little treasures. Throughout the years, I lived in different countries and although the time I spent time with my father was limited to school holidays, my memories of his words continue to be a source of counsel.

My father encouraged me to be perfect. His idea of perfection was proper diction, proper posture and proper manners. This perfection was necessary, he said, because in this world I would be judged not by my talents, but by the colour of my skin. When I was small and living in the Bahamas, surrounded by people who looked like me, I did not believe his words to be true. When I grew older and spent time abroad in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, China and India these words became part of a painful reality. In 1996 when I walked into the Dean's office of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University to declare my double major in Asian and African regional studies, one of the Deans said to me, "People with *your* background do not usually do well studying African politics and they certainly *never* study Oriental languages". This overt discrimination, I thought, was what my father must have experienced when he was a student at St. John's in Minnesota and again when he studied at Columbia in New York City. This is why perfection mattered; this is why he wanted me to be perfect.

My father was an avid reader. As I was growing up I was surrounded by my parents' books and I had my own children's library. Two of my favourite books come to mind-- *Chendru: the Boy and the Tiger*, and of course, *Dean's Big Book of Answers*. One of the titles on my father's bookshelf was *The Quiet*

Revolution by Dame Doris Johnson. He was deeply inspired by her work in education and her leadership role in the women's suffrage movement, which resulted in the granting of women's right to vote in the Bahamas in 1962. He told me how Dame Doris, accompanied by others with whom he was well acquainted--Cecil Wallace Whitfield, Arthur D. Hanna, and Lynden O. Pindling, had traveled to New York in August 1965 to present a petition to the United Nations Special Committee on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, that sought majority rule for the Bahamas. Dame Johnson had advocated for a "peaceful revolution" because she believed societal change could come about without violence or disorder and the Bahamas became a good model of this philosophy.

Although my father approved of the precepts of the "peaceful revolution" he was also attracted to the more controversial ideas of Franz Fanon, a West Indian psychoanalyst and social philosopher known for his aggressive views on the national liberation of colonial peoples. Fanon was influential in anti-racist political movements and his social gospel urged colonised peoples to purge themselves of their cultural inferiority in a "collective catharsis" to be achieved by violence against their European oppressors. He identified the stages of social and cultural development of a new nation emerging from the domination of colonial rule and he warned of the dangers of a nation achieving national liberation before achieving maturity in the development of its own culture. These ideas interested my father as he had pondered the necessary path to Bahamian liberation from colonial rule.

There was a marked-up, ragged copy of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* on the bookshelf in my father's study. In chapter 6 the following passage is underlined. Fanon writes "So, comrades, let us **not** pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature." My father must have realised that it was necessary to avoid merely imitating or reproducing the Crown's policies and ideologies as he was concerned about the need for *Bahamian* social, political and cultural development. This was not simply a matter of public policy--as many of you may remember and from before my time, my father led a protest against the establishment of the first "finger-lickin'-good" Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant on Bay Street (!) He believed that the KFC franchise as a concept would undermine traditional Bahamian food establishments and would negatively permeate Bahamian social and cultural identity.

My father was a practical man as well as a philosopher. Literally, philosophy means *love of wisdom*. His philosophical sagacity informed his approach to life and I realise now that he modeled this way of thinking and being as I grew up. It requires having both a sense of wonder and a focused concentration.

When I was little he included me in practical activities such as the time he built a large brick patio outside our farmhouse. He made the project intensely appealing to me as a curious, four year old child and then he patiently guided and supervised my efforts to stamp the sand flat with the child size wooden tool he had made for that purpose.

In my later years, he encouraged dialogue and relentless questioning. One debate we had was regarding the official policy of multiculturalism in Canada. During his tenure as Principal of Senator O'Connor College School in North York, Ontario, my father was faced with disciplinary issues involving students of Filipino, Chinese, African, South Asian, Iranian and West Indian descent. He believed that under the policy of multiculturalism students were not being taught to embrace dominant Canadian cultural norms and he thought the students' success in life was dependent on their ability to assimilate. I disagreed, reminding him of the history of assimilationist and often racist policies that had trapped children of Aboriginal descent in boarding schools and had also prevented persons of Chinese descent from political participation during the exclusion era. (This issue remains relevant to policy debates throughout Europe and in the so-called 'racial' democracies of the South.) Sometimes we simply had to agree to disagree.

My father valued *ideas*. He continued to privately study the work of historians, political theorists and politicians in the Caribbean—many of whom were arguing for the eradication of colonialism and advocating for human rights for all citizens. He was particularly impressed by the writings of Dr. Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of the Trinidad and Tobago. Williams fostered the idea that the Caribbean islands could join together in some sort of political union; this led to the Federation of the West Indies, the political union of British Caribbean territories, and in 1962 to Trinidad and Tobago's independence within the Commonwealth. In his 1962 Independence Day address, Williams gave the people a slogan for all time: *Discipline, Production, and Tolerance*. Williams warned against *indiscipline*, claiming that it was a threat to democracy. Indiscipline would produce a democracy that was but “a hollow mockery and a gigantic fraud which is based on a ruling group's domination ... [it would permit people] to show intolerance to others because of considerations of race, colour, creed, national origin, previous conditions of servitude or other irrationality.” My father liked slogans as long as they had *ideas* behind them and the emancipatory ideas behind Williams' slogans appealed to my father because they underscored his own values. I often wonder if my early exposure to Eric Williams was a foreshadowing of my marriage to Fareed Ali, a Trinidadian who is passionately clear about his identity as a West Indian.

Many people have told me that they wonder what would have happened if my father had never left the Bahamas. I cannot answer that question. He was a Bahamian of sharp intellect and great potential and no

doubt the country would have benefited from his presence. For me, I am left with the small, intimate memories of my father. The sound of his booming, deep-toned laugh; the sight of his well-worn Birkenstock sandals; the bitter-sweet, almond smell of his Jergens lotion; the feel of his soft leather driving gloves; the taste of maple syrup on steel cut oatmeal we ate together on a cold winter morning.

Love and farewell--Daddy. May you rest in peace.

--Jerusa