

Amanda Hennessy – Tribute to Sonny Ramphal

Queen's Chapel

1 July 2025

“They existed. We can be. Be and be better. For they” - he - “existed”.

Thank you all for being here today, on this most auspicious occasion, where we are amongst so many old friends. Ian, Mark and their families are sorry that they cannot be with us today, but extend their gratitude for your friendship to our family, over the decades.

In August last year, Dad died peacefully, at his home, in Barbados, having seen all of his nearest and dearest in the days and weeks before he passed. Following a private cremation in Barbados, his ashes were interned at The Place of the Seven Ponds in Guyana, following a State funeral. The family deeply appreciate all of the messages of condolence, and all of the commemorations that have taken place across the World. We are delighted that we are able to welcome you to join us here in London.

Dad had a way of inspiring and raising us all to our best. Many of his former colleagues are no longer with us or are unable to attend. Some of you have travelled across the globe to remember and celebrate Sonny's mighty life. I would like to extend particular thanks to The Commonwealth Association, The Round Table, and to Canon Wright and his team for facilitating the use of this beautiful chapel.

Dad would indeed be humbled, to know that we have gathered here, to remember him, here, in The Queen's Chapel, that is overlooked by the corner office in Marlborough House, the epicentre of his work in London. A place where many people sought to join him in his fight for justice, by changing jobs and relocating to London. Marlborough House was a place of serious business but it was also my childhood playground, sliding down the banisters and assisting with the 3.00pm tea trolley rounds. I was nine. I remember it as a truly happy place, and it is where many of you, got to know admire and respect the man that I call Dad.

Dad was SG for 15 years, a period that saw significant change for the Commonwealth. During the difficult years of working to end apartheid, he drew strength from all of you who worked along side him, as well as the steadfast support of the late Queen, a relationship that he valued enormously. They shared an unwavering concern for the whole Commonwealth.

Being a man that saw beyond title and standing, he equally valued and appreciated the dedicated, professional, and invaluable staff of Marlborough House who worked and continue

to work for the good of The Commonwealth family. Thank you to Honourable Shirley Botchwey and your staff, for supporting this commemoration and celebration of Dad and the significant part that he played in the Commonwealth's growth and standing.

His working life before and after this period were equally as impressive. He never for one moment stopped using his truly brilliant mind. His work was almost as important to him as his family. We were content with this as the importance of the fight for justice permeated into our lives as well.

Upon finishing his book, Glimpses of a Global Life, which he typed and retyped himself, as by this time, he had no secretary, Mum said, 'We have to find him another project.' But he already had that project. Guyana's fight at the ICJ. At the age of 91, he became the first person to address the ICJ remotely. The preparations were immense, including, at the height of the pandemic, his legal robes being retrieved from storage and FedExed from London to Barbados, curtains being made, furniture being rearranged, additional wi-fi being installed and the list goes on. His attention to detail was well known by all of us here, so you can imagine the preparations. This historic moment took place on 30th June 2020, exactly five years ago. The fight for justice sustained him to the end and had him reading and studying legal papers right up to his final days. His mind as sharp and quick as it ever had been. We are deeply thankful for that.

Today cannot pass without mention of Lois. The lady whom he loved and who stood by his side for 67 years, before her passing in 2019. She was a woman of immense strength, who was liked, admired and respected within this Commonwealth family and beyond. With Brenda and Indal, by her side, her entertaining talents became legendary, with never a stone unturned. I remember the preparations for the Christmas staff parties well, the curry and rum punch, both became legendary. Alongside her busy roles as Mother, Grandmother and Wife, her charitable work for the Education Fund of the Commonwealth Countries League, was extremely important to her. The CCL fair affectionately marked time in the family calendar.

Sonny and Lois, both from very different but equally humble backgrounds, were a formidable team. Never giving in to doubt, and together, they faced whatever life threw their way, with heads held high. They always extended their hands of friendship to those that needed it. On many occasions before and after her passing, Dad said, privately and publicly, that he could never have achieved all that he had, without Lois by his side. At her funeral in London, he read passages written by Keats, and Browning, from a book of poetry that she had given to him on his 21st birthday. That book was with him when he died.

Thank you for indulging me, as I try to sum up, in a few words, the man who was known as Dad, Grandad, Sonny, SG or Boss. How do we, condense a life, both personal and public, that

impacted so many around the globe, a life that was so rich, full, and diverse, in a few simple lines? His granddaughter did just that on the day that he died. I would like to share that with you today.

‘There are few words, other than thank you for the life you chose to lead. One that lifted and united those who had smaller voices. Thank you for being a Grandfather amongst it all.’

In Mahatma Ghandi’s words, ‘There are no Goodbyes’.