

MEMORIES OF DAYS GONE BY – By Eugene “Jean” Foggo Simon -

It sometimes takes death to bring back memories of one’s youth. Things that we take for granted, but what molded us into the adults we ultimately become. Some of these things we hid from the modern world, but they shaped me into becoming a responsible human being. This is offered in honor and in memory of my parents and sister – Oliver, Ursula and Millicent.

Living in a different country from my birthplace as an adult, I often wondered if my upbringing would come to fore and reveal my true culture. I recall being asked or questioned about my unique ways of doing things when machines could be used to make those chores easier. My response was that “I am a product of a small island; a family of knowledgeable people, who had to make do with their fate. They landed on an island in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean with nothing. They used their brains to figure out what they were going to do to stay alive”.

St. David’s Islanders were consistently referred to as “ducks, Cannibals, those things (not humans) that live on that island, Mohawks, etc.” We were brought by ship, dropped off to fend for ourselves until our so called “Masters” needed our skills so they could survive! We reluctantly stepped up to the plate because we wanted to continue to live. Thus, we became servants, slaves, or indentured servants to the early colonists.

The drop-off place was a small 504 acre island not connected to the rest of the land mass, called Bermuda. We chopped down trees with whatever tools were left for us, built our own homes, punts, made oars, figured out how to catch fish using hand built pots, made fishnets that were woven “on the rocks at the water’s edge” and then circled them off-shore to catch fish.

Our families lived on this acreage for over 375 years with hardly any notice from the rest of Bermuda. Then suddenly, disruption took place! Out of the blue, negotiations for our land to make way for a U.S. airfield/base were thrust upon our families. Decisions had been made “for us” without little to no discussion initially. Our homes and land were bulldozed! Our farms, livelihood, everything on the south side of St. David’s Island were totally destroyed. These are events I’ve researched.

My parents were newlyweds. I was born in 1938 just about the time destruction commenced. My father Oliver Foggo was 20 years old, and my mother Ursula Fox-Foggo was 18 years old. I don’t exactly know where they lived in 1938--- all I know is that their home was on the south side of St. David’s Island. If they had not lived on the land desired by the U.S., they would not have been displaced. I don’t know how they got to the wooden barracks on the north side of St. David’s Island that were erected for our displaced families. In 1939 my sister, Millicent, was born. We were 14 months apart.

Because I am intuitive, and have been so all my life, I remember a few incidents that have remained with me all of my life. Visions come to me. I asked my parents if my discussions, questions, etc., were true or did I made them up? “How can you know these things”, my mother asked me. “I see them---I visualize them”, I responded.

I also had a vivid memory of my sister near the steps that led to the wooden barrack we lived in. My mother was busy boiling starch so she could iron my father’s uniforms. He was a soldier in the Bermuda Militia Artillery, and was stationed at The Battery on St. David’s Island. In other words, our families lived close to both the US airfield/base as well as the UK/Bermuda Battery. There was no real concern for the lives of the civilians. Millicent and I were playing with wooden blocks, and my mother tripped on one and hot starch spilled on my sister’s back and arms.

Needless to say, she screamed, as we both ran towards my mother for help who by then had placed the pan on the ground.

Our paternal grandmother, Helen (Fox) Foggo, a local midwife and natural healer, was summonsed from nearby, arrived with banana leaves, Match-me-if-you-can leaves and a liquid she used to crush those leaves in. She tore up one of the sheets from my mother's clothesline to compress those leaves and liquid to my sister's burns. Over the following weeks the healing took place and my sister never had burn scars due to the skill of our grandmother's healing ability.

I don't know when our family was summonsed to move back to the south side of St. David's Island. I recall it was a stone house with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom and hallway. I later learned it was a home that had been built due to the taking of our land. It was on a hill on Lighthouse Road, overlooking both the south side as well as the north side. My father named it "Hope So". Whether my parents received anything else as far as reparations was concerned is highly not so. My father continued to work his carpentry job until his death. My mother who was born with a heart murmur sought work in the laundry on base, but could not continue due to her poor health. In other words, we did not have much by way of finances.

In 1996 my cousin Pat Foley and I learned that our great grandparent's home still stood on the base lands. While in use during the war, US officers had lived in it. We petitioned the Bermuda Land Development Company to buy back the home since it stood in disrepair and empty. We were told it was not for sale. Shortly thereafter it was demolished. Other homes were built on the base lands and sold to anyone whose names were pulled or "picked" from a lottery. I don't know how many St. David's Islanders were able to be successful, but we felt because we were born St. David's Islanders and had stepped forward that we had identified ourselves to the Bermuda Government, so another blow was against us.

I had hoped to return to Bermuda from Ohio and live on the land of my forefathers – my grandfather, Frederick Foggo, had been born in that home and particular parcel of land. My cousin, Pat Foley, passed away. I left my homeland, hurt, dejected, rejected, whatever and returned to Ohio. Do I think we should have been allowed to return to land that was taken from our great grandparents? Yes, I do! Or, at the very least, acknowledged that it did belong to Alfred Alfred Hamilton Hayward Foggo and Robena (Brown-Smith) Foggo. The anger or disgust I felt came back to haunt me and it was time to research why, how, when, my parents lived in a wooden barracks with so many other family members.

//Eugene "Jean" Foggo Simon

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