



The Admission of
Baroness Doreen Lawrence
OBE
as an Honorary Freewoman
of the London Borough of Lewisham



Ref: 578-2a

Civic Suite, Lewisham Town Hall
6.00pm on Friday 14 March 2014

Doreen Lawrence

Early life

Doreen Lawrence was born in Jamaica in 1952 and raised by her grandparents. She was the only grandchild and her grandmother in particular was an extremely important part of her life. She was Doreen's 'comfort blanket'. 'It was a great life, it was free, no limits.'

When her grandmother died in 1961 she went to live with her mother's sister and her cousins. However, her aunt found it difficult to look after Doreen as well as her own children and so the following year, at the age of nine, she moved to the UK to join her mother, stepfather and younger brother.

'It was very exciting. I was looking forward to it but I knew very little about the UK except it was cold. I travelled by myself although a gentleman and his daughter looked after me at the airport. When I arrived, my mother was waiting for me with my two-year-old brother. It was the first time I had seen him. Everything was new and strange. It took a long time to settle in.'

Doreen lived with her family in Brockley and went to John Stainer Primary School.

'At that time there were not that many black children around. I found it difficult to catch up because I had missed some of my schooling after my grandmother died. I had difficulty with my reading in particular.'



*You need to have a
clear vision
of truth
and justice*



Married life

After leaving school, Doreen married and had three children – Stephen, Stuart and Georgina.

‘Stephen was 18 months old when I started working at Goldsmiths book shop. Life was really good. We lived in Woolwich and we all used to have a great time going to the park, the cinema, just normal things really. I was always at home in the evening and I would cook and then they would read to me and I would help them with their schoolwork and help them to spell.’

‘When the children were older, Christmas was always a special time. They would be at home and we would all stand in a line in the kitchen making mince pies in a type of conveyor belt.’

The years after 22 April 1993

Stephen was murdered at the age of 18 on 22 April 1993 in an unprovoked racist attack. To this date, only two of the five perpetrators have been put in prison for his murder. Doreen is still fighting for justice for her son, taking on the police and judicial system.

‘It was my anger about being treated as a second-class citizen and a belief that my son’s life was valuable that made me more determined. I remember saying to one police officer, my son will never be a statistic. We take our children for granted and it’s only when things like this happen that we realise how important they are. Our lives are important. But you can’t be angry all the time. You need to have a clear vision of truth and justice, and the change you want to see happen.’



Lasting legacy

For over 20 years, Doreen has sought justice for her son while creating a positive and dynamic legacy in his honour.

As a young child, Stephen demonstrated an interest in art; he loved to draw and paint. Stephen was a keen learner; he was good at most subjects at school, but his best were art and maths. Stephen decided to use his skills in art design and maths to aim for a university place studying architecture.

In 1998, she set up the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust to help young people realise their ambitions to become architects and, in 2008, the Stephen Lawrence Centre was opened in Deptford, enabling thousands more young people to nurture and use their creativity.

‘Without God’s help I wouldn’t be able to do these things. Not every day has been fantastic. I have my down days and it’s difficult when the government and the police are against you. But I find strength from other people who are supporting me, my faith, and my family. Life isn’t fantastic but we do what we need to do when we need to do it. Stephen would help people but he never bragged about what he did. He was very selfless.’



To achieve things in life, you achieve them with other people





In 2013 she entered the House of Lords as a peer and took the title Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon; a district in Jamaica where her family's from and where Stephen is buried.

'I want to use my role in the House of Lords to give others a voice. It's important for someone of my background to have a voice because usually it isn't the case. People tell me their personal experiences – such as when they're stopped and searched – and now I can tell other people who can change things.'

Vision for the future

When Stephen died, Doreen was in the first year of studying for a degree and she had ambitions to be a primary school teacher. While trying to come to terms with his death and simultaneously campaigning for justice, she continued to study – graduating with a degree in humanities in 1995.

*I'm imagining a day
when we don't have
to think about race*



'Studying was useful in many ways. My degree was a distraction and a diversion from everything else that was happening. My personal tutor, Bridget Leach, was very very good. She would help and support me. During exam times I couldn't bear to be in a room with lots of other people. She would help me when I hit a brick wall. She gave me the opportunity to do that.'

Now, providing others with educational opportunities is her main priority. 'Education is the basis of change. At the Stephen Lawrence Centre we try to

give opportunities to young people – not just black children – and teach them that we need to value and respect each other. Now we want to look at other professions such as law, journalism and media where there are very few role models. In Leeds, we've also just established the Stephen Lawrence Education Standard to help schools establish race equality.'

'I'm working for young people. I'm working for all the other Stephens out there. Education is important. I want to be able to help them grow and take their place in society, to expand the range of opportunities available.' 'It might be naive but I'm imagining a day when we don't have to think about race, a day when anyone can apply for any job and have the same opportunity to advance through merit. Hopefully one day we'll get there.'

Freewoman

In admitting Doreen as an honorary Freewoman of the Borough, the Council is recognising her incredible resilience and fortitude over the last two decades and the courage she has shown in her fight for justice for her son. Her determination to build the Stephen Lawrence Centre and the Trust was a huge undertaking which has succeeded in becoming a reality. The centre is thriving and helping to shape the lives of many young people to forge a career in architecture.

Freedom of the London Borough of Lewisham

Doreen's dignity and endurance are exemplary characteristics and a testament of what can be achieved in the face of adversity, so there can no more fitting an accolade than to confer on Doreen the highest honour the Council has the power to bestow – the Freedom of the London Borough of Lewisham.





The scroll

The scroll has been illuminated on vellum by a local artist who has captured specific images to reflect Doreen's life.

At the top is the Lewisham coat of arms and also featured are the Jamaican flag, the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust motif and an image of the Stephen Lawrence Centre. The scroll has the seal of the Council and is signed by the Mayor and Chief Executive. It is leather bound to protect it and features the wording of the recommendation that was agreed at a meeting of the full Council held on Wednesday 26 June 2013.

The casket

The casket has been designed and created to a particular style for presentation. At one end is the Jamaican coat of arms and the other end the Jamaican flag.

The inscription on the casket reads:

Presented to Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE, of the Clarendon Commonwealth Realm of Jamaica by the London Borough of Lewisham on her admission as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham.

Friday 14 March 2014



London Borough of Lewisham

Meeting of the Council Friday 14 March 2014, 6.00pm

Order of proceedings

1. Councillors (other than those in the Mayoral party) and all invited guests will take their seats in the Council Chamber and public gallery.
2. The Mayoral party will escort Baroness Lawrence OBE, her family and other key people who are speaking, into the Council Chamber to their seats on the dais. [Guests and members are asked to stand please].
3. The Vice Chair of Council, Councillor Jackie Addison will open proceedings, report any apologies for absence and make any announcements.
4. The Vice Chair of Council will welcome the High Commissioner of Jamaica, Freeman, Freewomen, Jim Dowd MP, members and guests. She will then announce the Council is meeting for the sole purpose to admit Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon OBE, of the Clarendon Commonwealth Realm of Jamaica, as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham.
5. The admission of Baroness Lawrence OBE as an Honorary Freewoman of the Borough. The Vice Chair of Council to report that under Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, a Borough Council can admit to the Honorary Freedom the Borough 'persons of distinction and persons who have, in the

opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Borough’.

6. The Vice Chair of Council will call upon Barry Quirk, the Chief Executive to read the following resolution of the Council passed unanimously at the Council meeting on 26 June 2013.

Under Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, a borough Council can admit to the Freedom of the Borough ‘persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the borough’. The Freedom of the Borough is the highest honour a Council has the power to bestow.

The Council recommendation

It is recommended that Baroness Lawrence OBE be admitted as an Honorary Freewoman of the London Borough of Lewisham in recognition of her work in seeking justice for her son, Stephen, and creating a positive and dynamic legacy in his honour through the setting up of the Stephen Lawrence Centre and Charitable Trust.

To do one of these things in the wake of such a devastating personal tragedy would be remarkable but to do both indicates someone deserving of the highest recognition. The dignity and humanity that she has demonstrated throughout the last 20 years makes her a truly inspirational figure in our Borough.

7. Baroness Lawrence OBE will then be invited to sign the Freedom Roll of Honour Book. The

Mayor and Chief Executive will counter sign as witnesses.

8. The Vice Chair of Council will call upon the following to speak to the recommendation: Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor of Lewisham; Rt Hon Jack Straw MP (recorded video message); representatives from the Liberal Democrat group and the Green Party; Imran Khan; Reverend David Cruise; Rt Hon David Blunkett MP (recorded video message); Her Excellency Aloun Ndomet-Assamba, High Commissioner of Jamaica; and Stuart Lawrence.
9. Following the speeches the Mayor will then formally present the casket containing the Council’s recommendation to Baroness Lawrence OBE on a specially inscribed scroll sealed by the Council.
10. Baroness Lawrence OBE will then thank the Council for the honour of the Freedom of the Borough that has been accorded to her.
11. The formal proceedings having ended, the Mayoral party will leave the Council Chamber. [Everyone is asked to stand at this point.]
12. All Members and invited guests are cordially invited to a civic reception in the Civic Suite Foyer, giving everyone the opportunity to congratulate Doreen Lawrence in a convivial atmosphere with a short musical performance by the X-Factor runner up in 2012, Jahméne Douglas.