

## Run to Win – the dedication, commitment and service of Judy Yaiyon

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### SUMMARY

**This article documents the life and achievements of Judy Yaiyon Aupae from the perspectives of her three daughters. Judy was born in Enga Province and raised by her mother, who was the second wife of a chief. The article explores the origins of Judy's interest in health care as a child. It further explores her commitment to helping others through training as a nurse and, later, through working in physiotherapy. The article also documents Judy's recent gaining of further qualifications in physiotherapy through her completion of a degree at Divine Word University in Madang.**

### Family background and the early years

Judy Yaiyon Aupae (née Reme) was born and raised in Mamale village, Laiagam District, Enga Province – then part of Western Highlands District in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. She was the second child of Reme Sangai Lakani, chief of the Laei tribe of the Pyain clan, and Parame Reme (née Aen) of the Tumbipyain tribe. Judy's birth occurred around two or three years after the arrival of Christian Apostolic missionaries in Mamale village in 1954, which family oral history indicates as the year Judy's father had given some of his land for the establishment of a Christian mission station at Mamale.

Judy was born into a large family. As polygamy was culturally acceptable in her society at that time, her father had four wives. The first wife had five children. Judy's mother was the second wife and had only two children, her older brother (who passed away in 1991) and herself. The third wife had one child and the fourth wife had three. Because her father had more than one wife, Judy and her brother were effectively rejected and neglected by their father. They were, however, loved, cared for and single-handedly raised by their mother, a strong principled woman of Christian faith who did not give up or discard her children. With the support of her cousin-brothers, Judy's mother was determined to give her children a good life and worked hard by planting vegetable

gardens and raising pigs, which she then sold in order to raise a bit of money to put Judy and her brother through school. Judy believes that she was also fortunate and privileged to have grown up in a village hamlet which was nestled beside the missionary station, as this close proximity enabled her to interact with the missionary families, which influenced her early development and also placed her in good stead for her future.

### Education

In 1964 at the age of seven, Judy commenced her primary education at the Mamale Apostolic Primary School. As a young girl Judy was hard-working, both at home and academically. She excelled at school and scored very high marks in assessments. While in primary school, Judy was employed by some of the teachers at the school, as well as the missionaries, to help on a part-time basis with home chores such as babysitting, cooking and cleaning, in order to earn a bit of pocket money to pay for her school fees. On a number of occasions, Judy was taken as an English interpreter to accompany missionary nurses on medical (health and hygiene) patrols to the surrounding villages, because of her language ability and her confidence in interacting with people. It was during these medical patrols that Judy developed an interest in medicine and health care. Judy says that the early missionaries and teachers in her village were great role models for

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her. She witnessed first-hand important and valuable traits such as love, care, dedication, commitment, self-denial and concern for other people. Judy was also often called on by the church pastors to interpret during church sermons.

In 1969 Judy completed her primary education and the following year enrolled at the Pausa Lutheran High School in Wapenamanda, Wabag District. In mid-1971 a team of health workers from Yagaum Hospital in Madang came to the school and conducted a health outreach; they informed the students about the Lutheran School of Nursing in Madang and encouraged them to apply after finishing high school. It was around that time that Judy was faced with a significant decision in her life. Although Judy wanted to continue her higher education, she was also realistic about her financial situation. After considering the financial struggle her mother sustained to put her through school, Judy decided that the best option for her was to get a job quickly to look after her mother. Given her early exposure to and interest in the field of health care, Judy applied and was subsequently selected to undertake her studies at the Lutheran School of Nursing as an enrolled hospital nurse (nursing officer). In 1975 Judy successfully completed her training and graduated with high distinction, attaining a Dux of Nursing Council Exam Award, and became an enrolled hospital nurse.

### **First posting and a family**

In 1976, Judy's first posting as a nurse was at the Yagaum Lutheran Hospital, which was the main hospital in Madang Province at that time. Because of her commitment and work ethic it was not long before Judy was given the responsibility of being nurse in charge of the children's ward.

In 1977 Judy married John Aupae, a health inspector from Manam Island, Bogia District in Madang Province. A young family was soon on the way and Judy left her job at the hospital to become the homemaker. In 1978 she applied for a nursing role at the Modilon General Hospital – which had recently become the main referral hospital in Madang – but did not receive a positive response. In 1982 Judy gave birth to her second child and continued in her role as homemaker. In 1984 Judy was engaged by the College of Allied Health Sciences in Madang and worked as the mess

supervisor for a short period.

### **Return to nursing – Modilon General Hospital**

In April 1984 the Director of Nursing at the Modilon General Hospital, Matron Mary Kamang, recruited Judy and on 9 April she started working in the children's outpatient department. In September the same year Matron Kamang was approached by Marianne Klus, a Canadian volunteer with CUSO International in the physiotherapy department, with a request for staff to be placed in the physiotherapy department to work with her and learn on the job because her term was soon ending.

Matron Kamang invited Judy to take on the role on a one-month trial basis and told her that she could report back whether she liked it or not. Although Judy had no practical experience in the discipline of physiotherapy, she quickly found the role very interesting, encouraging and inspiring – especially the sight of the crippled and the lame, both young and old, beginning to walk again. On expiration of the trial period she reported to the matron that she would remain in that role. The main interest for Judy was the innovation that physiotherapy represented, in terms of the treatment of various mobility conditions that, in disabled persons, medicinal drugs had little success in improving. Through physiotherapy, people could improve their condition, their health and even their personal livelihood – that was the importance and value of physiotherapy.

In August 1988 Ms Klus departed and Judy was left with the responsibility of overseeing the physiotherapy department as the unit manager. In 1990, Australian volunteer physiotherapist Debbie Lewin joined the department for a two-year period. Ms Lewin continued to provide a mentoring role for Judy and helped her to acquire new knowledge in treatment and patient care. After Ms Lewin left the department, Judy continued to manage the unit until 1995 when Hugh Saweni, one of the first national physiotherapists, was appointed to head the department. Unfortunately, Mr Saweni could stay with the department for only one year because of inadequate staff accommodation. Again, Judy was left to manage the department up until 2000, when South African physiotherapist Nina Venestra was placed with the department through VSO

(Voluntary Service Overseas). Ms Venestra was instrumental in putting together plans for the establishment of the physiotherapy school at the Divine Word University. It was during this period that much of Judy's practical experience and knowledge was drawn upon in collating and preparing the teaching and training materials. When Ms Venestra left the department to start the physiotherapy school at the Divine Word University in 2002, Mr Saweni returned. During this period Judy realized the importance of having the appropriate and necessary qualification for the role she was performing.

### **Back to school**

In 2004 Judy approached the hospital management and sought approval for her bid to undergo formal training at the Divine Word University's School of Physiotherapy. With Mr Saweni's endorsement, her application was approved and Judy enrolled in the diploma of physiotherapy from 2005 to 2007. In March 2008 Judy graduated. She

was a qualified, registered physiotherapist and subsequently undertook her two-year residency at the Modilon General Hospital. In 2012 the physiotherapy school at Divine Word University started a degree program, which Judy enrolled in. On 3 March 2013, after years of faithful dedication and commitment to her vocation, Judy was rewarded when she graduated with a bachelor's degree in physiotherapy from the Divine Word University – it was a proud moment for the family as much as a momentous personal achievement. Judy was inspired and motivated to persevere by the motto of Divine Word University, 'Run to Win', which we have used as the title of this article on her life of dedication, commitment and service (Figure 1).

### **Vocation in health care – encouragement and motivation**

Based on her experiences, Judy believes that pursuing a vocation in health care is an important discipline which requires something more than empathy for others. It requires



Figure 1. Judy Yaiyon Aupae at her graduation.

a deep desire to help fellow human beings, whether they are rich or poor, young or old, and from whatever cultural background or upbringing they may come from. Other important health care traits are kindness and compassion. Judy explains that she finds it rewarding when bedridden patients begin walking and moving freely again, as a result of her treatment. As part of her personal and professional work ethos Judy believes that being faithful in whatever you do, by having confidence in your own abilities, is critical. She says that being able to apply yourself and have patience and, most importantly, persevere in the face of challenges and times of difficulty are integral qualities for health care workers.

Nurses are vital and play an important role in the development of health care in Papua New Guinea (PNG). From an economic perspective, a healthy population translates to a healthy work force. At the moment the national government is looking at developing

a national health standard. In this regard, Judy is of the firm view that before a national standard can be developed and approved by government bureaucrats, those working in health care need to set the health standards.

There are tremendous challenges faced by health care workers, especially in the context of PNG, and professionals from all health care disciplines require the best support if they are to perform their duties at the highest levels of quality.

Judy attributes all her achievements in life, and her life itself, to her faith in God and His providence. Judy pays tribute to her dear mother, who not only brought her into the world, but also raised and cared for her and was her role model by imparting important principles and values. Finally, Judy acknowledges the vital role churches played by providing vital services in health and education wherein she is a beneficiary.