



In Loving Memory
of



Eugenie "Une" Gumbs
1910-1999

Funeral Services

Wednesday, January 20, 1999
Viewing 9:00 a.m.-9:30 a.m.
John Thomas Memorial Chapel

Service 10:00 a.m.
St. Anne's Chapel

Officiant: Fr. Sanchez

Interment
Western Cemetery

Eulogy

Eugenie Blanchard was born July 14, 1910 to her parents on the small French island of St. Barthelemy. How appropriate that this woman, who would never lose her French citizenship should be born on Bastille Day, the highest of the French national holidays. As a small girl she would grow up in the poverty that had gripped the French island for so many years. Fish and tourism were not yet much of a commodity on the island. In 1922, at the age of twelve she would leave her island home, two brothers, and two sisters, never to return. She came to the newly organized American possession of St. Thomas. Here she would live for several years with an old aunt. Along with girls her age, she learned the craft of straw work, a craft well known in her native St. Bart's, but one she did not learn until she came to St. Thomas, and one she would carry on until very late in her life.

It was the straw work that "Une", the name she went by in Frenchtown, did that would sustain her for many years. Not only would it eventually become a source of much needed income, but it was also a way to relax. Late in her life she could be seen whiling away the hours weaving her straw mats or sewing her hats. As much as it was a vocation it was also a kind of therapy for her.

It was in 1928, at the age of eighteen that she would marry John Claude Gumbs, a man she would remain married to for over sixty years. At twenty she would have her first child, John, and at forty-four her last, Kenneth. In between she would have twelve others of which ten survive.

Eugenie or "Tata", as her grandchildren and so many others knew her, lived a life that was far from being without trial. There was the time when Claude was in the hospital and Tata was left with six children and no means of support. Her oldest, John, went to work at a shoe store for twelve cents an hour to help feed the family and buy medicine for his father. Among with John's income and Tata's meager returns from her straw work, they were able to manage the crisis.

When Tata's own mother died, she was pregnant and taking care of one of her own brood who was deathly ill with pneumonia. It was that night, the very night her mother died, that Tata's mother came to her in a dream and patted her round belly. Tata knew after that, that everything would be all right.

When you stop to examine her life something becomes so evident; so many years where there was nothing more than want; so many years when her husband was sick, especially so many years at the end of his life; so many items when she must have been more tired than God on the seventh day, but she never gave up. So many times the odds against her seemed insurmountable. So many items all she had worked for seemed to be inches from slipping away. So many times when the strongest of us would have given up, Tata prevailed. She would not give up; she COULD not give up. It was not in her character to give up. Once she had said, "I have never asked Jesus for more than I needed." And she very seldom ever received more than that.

But Tata's story is not just one of endurance, not just one of religious resolve, but one of success. Tata had come to his island as a small poverty stricken waif. She had married the man she loved and for over sixty years stayed by his side. She had all of those children, all of them knowing what it meant to work hard; knowing that very little was given to anybody. If it was worth having, it was worth working for. She had raised ten children and watched them make their way in the world. That was more success than anyone could wish for.

In 1980 she was interviewed for a special commemorative newspaper edition. She was recognized as one of the French immigrants from St. Bart's. She remembered old St. Thomas as one that was "like paradise." She talked about how the kids would lay on the floor and she would open the doors to let the breeze blow over them.

The most amazing thing about Tata is that after all she had been through, after the way she struggled through so much of her life she still remembered those days as "like paradise". If she has taught us anything in her long life, it should be that nothing good comes without struggle, and the struggle is only made easier with the love and the guidance of Jesus Christ.

She said once that she would lay in bed at night and "pray to Jesus." She would also sit swinging in her hammock, her bare feet hitting the floor, her hat pulled down and the straw work in her lap, praying to Jesus. All those years she prayed only for what she needed and always, it seemed, she was rewarded.

One night several years ago, Tata had a dream. In the dream there was a tree and she was picking diamonds off of it. She collected three diamonds in all. She laughed and those of us that heard the story also laughed. A few minutes later the phone rang and for the first time since she had left her home island, after over sixty years, she heard the voice of her young sister, Zabet. In the next several minutes she would also talk to her two other surviving siblings, a brother and another sister. After she had handed the phone to Pem, the daughter that had cared so lovingly for her in the late years of her life, she turned and said, "Those are my three diamonds."

After Tata lost her mate of so many years, her mind became tired and it went inside itself. For the last four years of her life Tata's mind lived somewhere else. But when she was told, son-in-law, Ken had died, she replied, "I know, I felt a warm breeze."

So with that simple phrase, a simple phrase that came from somewhere long buried in her mind, Tata has left us with an irreplaceable image.

A warm breeze...a tree with diamonds...Tata barefoot in her hammock, her hat over her eyes and there in her simple clapboard house is her beloved Claude...Andy, her son, in the next hammock... Ken and Bob, her sons-in-law coming up the walk... a yard filled with friends and relatives that had gone long before her, the fireworks of ninety Bastille Day's exploding in the air...and Jesus listening once more, but this time as he sways in a hammock... and granting her wishes greater than she could or would ever wish herself.

Survivors

Sons:	John L. Gumbs, Teddy Gumbs, Frank Gumbs, Kenneth Gumbs
Daughters:	Rose Carpenter, Rita Rarman, Francilia Blanchard, Mary Smith, Patricia Vega, Carol Stinson
Sister:	Elizabeth Magras
Brothers:	Pierre Blanchard, Jean Blanchard
Daughters-in-law:	Joy Gumbs, Sarah Gumbs
Sons-in-law:	Louis Blanchard, Wally Vega, Danny Stinson
Sisters-in-law:	Juliana Gumbs, Leoni Gumbs, Bertile Vante
Special God-Child:	Florence Phillip
Grandchildren:	Carol Ann Brainard, Bill, Time Kenny & John Carpenter, John Gumbs, Jr., Willis, Patrick, Mark & Mary Beth Tarman Tony, Patrick, Theresa & Gerard Blanchard, Claudine Vega, Melissa, Kenny & Lennete Gumbs, Jared, Jonah & Joel Stinson, Natasha & Shanada Gumbs

Twenty Great Grandchildren and many other relatives and friends.