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Tuesday, July 31, 2001

An African royal finds her way

By U. Deloris Brewer

The Princeton Packet

Wednesday, August 1, 2001

Princess Fumi Ogun of Emure-Ekiti, Nigeria, is not your typical storybook princess. Her life story reads like a contemporary adventure novel.

Born into Nigeria's Adumori royal family, Princess Fumi has pushed beyond heartache and adversity to fulfill what she believes is her "destiny." She aspires to a higher call of service — and she is not above doing a lot of hard work.

"My life is not just touched so I can sit there and look pretty, but to go forth and touch somebody else's life," said Princess Fumi, who is known in and around the Princeton area as Stephanie Thompson.

Thompson is her ex-husband's name. A failed marriage is just one element of the despair the princess has overcome. Looking back, she recalls how the abuse she suffered during six years of boarding school, continual chaos in her life, and her unhappy marriage caused so much grief that she attempted suicide.

This cry for help received an answer. Princess Fumi embraced a resurgence of Christian faith. Reaching out to touch the lives of others, she reclaimed her title and found new purpose and a more positive perspective. Of her past, she says, "I can look back now and say I'm not glad it happened, but I'm the better for it."

Princess Fumi and her sisters and brother were born and raised in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. She is the daughter of Prince Theo Ademola and Mrs. Remi Ogunleye. Her uncle reigned as king in their village after the death of her grandfather. Following her uncle's death, her father abdicated the throne, renouncing his birthright in exchange for freedom from the restricted life of a royal figurehead.



Princess Fumi Ogun of Nigeria with her Kembu Kingdom "Junganimals": "The essential part is just to have kids embrace other people's cultures."

Staff photo by Mark Czajkowski

Princeton Packet Online News: An African royal finds her way

<http://www.packetonline.com/news/8-01-01african.html>



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PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Yet there was a time when Princess Fumi was trapped within the rigidity of a royal existence. At age 10, she was sent to a Nigerian boarding school. It was required for her to learn a certain measure of etiquette. By age 19, Princess Fumi had earned her first degree. A year later, she immigrated to the United States. She was sent by her father, who believed in her potential and decided that it was time for her to experience the world beyond her homeland.

Princess Fumi attended the New York Institute of Technology. She completed her program in just a year and earned a master's degree in communication arts, then returned to Nigeria.

"I knew I was a writer," Princess Fumi said. "I knew I was very creative, but at the same time, as a royal ... there are some things you don't mess with," she said.

While at school in New York, she had written a thesis titled "The Royal Bird." After returning home, she was hired as a producer at a Nigerian television station. The station bought her story and made it into a "movie of the week."

"That's how I began," said Princess Fumi. "I just knew that that creative part was in me."

In Nigeria, Princess Fumi married, and eventually she and her husband decided to move to the United States and live in New York. She dropped her first name and picked up her middle name, Stephanie.

"When I came here, I just wanted to be me," the princess said.

Princess Fumi said that while with her now ex-husband, whom she has known for nearly 26 years, she began a preschool. Her business was teaching. After a season of misfortune and a painful process of divorce, her teaching ended, but Princess Fumi wanted to continue working with children.

From this desire sprung one of several projects that Princess Fumi has made her life's work. IslandKidz, Inc., is her on-line "Kid's E-Kingdom," created to offer a fun, educational environment where families can retrieve information, enjoy and explore various cultures. She is a persuasive advocate of the positive effects of culture in making and shaping children's lives.

The mother of two young boys, Princess Fumi had often created characters and made up stories to entertain her sons. She began sketching and designing characters representing certain aspects of Nigerian culture. She created the Kembu Kingdom and dubbed her characters "Junganimals." With the design of each Junganimal comes a story evolving from the Kembu Royal Palace.

Princess Fumi wants to offer an opportunity for children to learn about African and other cultures, through unique on-line stories, games and activities. ¶ "The essential part is just to have kids embrace other people's cultures," said Princess Fumi. Each year, she hopes to present a new island, a "sister island," which will highlight another culture.

Now living and traveling between New York and Plainsboro, where she moved in 1996, Princess Fumi has completed on-line course work for a doctorate degree in strategic communication.

With the help of her fiancé, David Allen Hancock, whom she met through her business and travel ventures, Princess Fumi hopes to further develop her cyber world for children. Mr. Hancock will assume the position of CEO and managing partner of IslandKidz, Inc., next year. He holds a bachelor's degree in management information systems from the University of Michigan School of Business and a master's degree in interdisciplinary technology from the Eastern Michigan University School of Technology.

Princess Fumi raises funding for the Web site through her writing. She promotes her book, "Stepping Out! Fulfilling Your Destiny" (Writer's Showcase, ISBN: 0-595-15869-2), a chronicle of her personal journey.

She also accepts speaking engagements, locally and around the country. The princess has a contract with The Plaza at The Windrows Assisted Living Community, where she gives presentations on African culture and motivational talks, with insights from her book.

"As a result of this book, I formed another company called Miracle Angel Organization, a nonprofit," said Princess Fumi.

She said the organization was formed to teach women how to "step out" into their destinies. Most of the profits of her book will go towards the funding of this effort which she considers her real pet project.

Through her Miracle Angel Organization, she has launched an on-line magazine called "Eve's Promise." Women can visit the Web site and see how other women are triumphing over extraordinary challenges.

Princess Fumi has worked with Womenspace as a program coordinator and later went on to work for the Children's Home Society, both in Mercer County. She has talked with "second chance" pregnant teenagers.

"That's a passion that I really have, to touch them," she said.

Princess Fumi is obviously no stranger to hard work, which can be seen in the multiple ventures she has undertaken.

In addition to a Christian television show she produces and directs, she hosts a talk show, also in the New York area, called "Stepping Out," which she hopes to expand to New Jersey. Princess Fumi attends the Princeton Alliance Church in Plainsboro.

Her book and background experience caught the attention of officials at Mercer County Community College. She will begin teaching communications there this fall.

One passage in her book spells out Princess Fumi's belief in her mission:

"It does not matter how you have lived, what you did or where you were born ... God's word is pregnant with your destiny. And those who carry this word must begin to birth it, so that it can yield great fruit ... "

For additional information on IslandKidz, Inc., or the Miracle Angel Organization, visit www.islandkidz.com or www.miracleangel.com. For additional information, e-mail princessfumi@miracleangel.com