

# BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE MR. W. G NARTEY

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## **BIRTH and CHILDHOOD**

Mr. Wilson Gbli Nartey, also known as, WG, Manager, Kokotako, Tseko, Wuda, made his entrance into this world at Bernyanor/Lekpongunor on the 7th of September, 1916. Born to Numo Tettehwayo Korley from the Loweh Adainya and Kabiaweh clans of Ningo, and Maa Maku Yowieh “Ablotsiyo” Aberbleh from the Bantama and Ohenease clans of Ningo, Wilson was the 7th of 8 children.

Exactly a year after he was born, calamity struck Old Ningo, when the town, including the chief’s Palace was set ablaze as a result of chieftaincy disputes in the Royal Family. This internal strife spread to several surrounding Ningo settlements, including WG’s hometown of Lekpongunor, leading his father, Numo Tettehwayo Korley to move his family eastwards; first to Anyanam, then to Ocansey Korpey and finally to Ada Foah.

Upon settling at Anyanam, his father, along with his brothers and cousins, acquired three canoes to start a fishing business, which quickly became very successful. With an astute and wealthy fisherman for a father, and a mother who was well respected in the community as a queen mother and a successful trader, WG and his siblings grew up in a happy and well-respected home.

In 1936, the family relocated their thriving fishing business from Ada Foah back to Lekpongunor. His father who by then had acquired six canoes, trained his children to follow in his footsteps. Like his siblings, Wilson was drafted into the family fishing business, where his main duty was to bail water for the canoe on their fishing expeditions. As much as he respected his father, WG did not want to follow in his footsteps and become a fisherman. He knew that he had many other talents and he was determined to explore them. Even at the young age of 20, his interests were much more business oriented. He preferred to help his mother in her trading business than to go to sea with his father and brothers. At a minimum, he thought he could be a fishing clerk, handling the purchase of fishing nets and other supplies, and possibly managing the cash from the sale of fish from his father’s canoes.

## **EDUCATION AND EARLY CAREER**

As fate would have it, one day while Wilson and his siblings were mending his father’s fishing nets on their compound, a group of school children marched past the house, singing joyfully. Intrigued and moved by their infectious smiles and jubilant spirits he immediately abandoned his tasks and joined them in their singing. Instantly, young Wilson knew that he had to go to school just to re-live the joy he experienced that day with those school children. He realized that education would be the key to unlocking many opportunities for him. With his mother’s blessing, WG left home and enrolled at a primary school at Old Ningo.

Wilson excelled in his education. He loved school and was so bright that he completed primary school in just four years, instead of seven. From there, he moved to Ayikuma to live with his sister and brother-in-law to start his middle school education. Again, he excelled, completing middle school in three instead of four years. Wilson was an impressive young boy, mature for his age and well groomed. Under the mentorship of his brother-in-law, Mr. F.K. Kwetey (Teacher Kwetey), Wilson passed his middle school Leavers Examination with Distinction. This earned him admission into the Gold Coast People’s College, now Ghanatta Senior High School in 1942.

In 1946, during his 4th year at Secondary school, tragedy struck. Wilson’s mother’s store was broken into and ransacked by thieves who also stole money and other personal belongings from her bedroom. Without thinking twice, Wilson quickly left school to go and take care of his mother. When later asked why he left school, Wilson said that it was more important to him that his mother, who he called-“YOEH” (short for YOWIEH) be alive and well, than it was to leave her unsafe, in the name of pursuing an education. To personally ensure his mother’s safety and to provide for her wellbeing, Wilson decided to forgo his secondary school education temporarily. Anyone who knew how much he loved his mother, was not surprised by this decision. However, after a year, he became restless and decided to find something to do that would help him support his mother financially. He knew he needed to get a job so that he could help his older siblings provide for their mother. His ambition at that time was to become an accountant, so he wanted a job that would allow him to make that goal a reality.

With the assistance of Mr. Addotey Akpey, a native from Ada, and Mr. Sika Nartey a timber merchant from New Ningo, WG left for Takoradi to look for a job. He quickly found a job with Messrs Elder Dempster, a construction firm at the Takoradi Harbor. Working as a time keeper and tally Clerk, Wilson was a dedicated worker, always punctual, smartly dressed, and so efficient in carrying out his duties that his manager greatly relied on him. Unfortunately, just two years later, the company finished their existing contract and had to re-locate to Nigeria. To avoid moving too far away from his mother, WG turned down an offer to relocate with the company to Nigeria.

Mr. Addotey Akpey welcomed Wilson into his home and helped him to get another job. With a stable job and secure accommodation, WG turned his attention to pursuing his Accountancy certificate. In 1949 he graduated with a Higher National Diploma (HND) in accounting. He continued to work hard and earned the trust and respect of his supervisors. His success was especially meaningful because he had given up his dream of finishing school to take care of his mother.

## **ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS**

Many who are familiar with WG know him as an extraordinary entrepreneur. That journey into entrepreneurship started in 1951. After saving enough money, he began to invest in others by offering small business loans at a reasonable interest rate. He also made a deposit on five Austin (1 ½ ton) trucks from the British Merchants, UAC which he resold to close friends and relatives at a profit.

After Ghana's independence in 1957, Mr. Nartey decided to relocate to Accra, to start his own small business. He later said, "I came to Accra with a bicycle and a tipper truck". In 1958, he established the Gold Coast Machinery and Construction Co. (a block factory, sand and stone supplier) at Labadi, and in 1964, he formed Modern Ghana Builders Ltd, his flagship construction company. Modern Ghana Builders, was involved in major construction works in almost every Region of Ghana. As Managing Director, Mr. Nartey's reputation as an astute businessman grew rapidly. He was well respected as one of the pioneers in the building and road construction industry. It was therefore not a surprise when one of his western styled building designs was chosen by the ministry of housing as the model for other contractors to emulate and replicate.

He worked on several high visibility projects, notable among them: the Accra Technical Training Centre, the Police Depot- Accra, Dansoman Estates, Laterbiokoshie flats, parts of Kanda Estates, parts of Osu Ringway Estates, part of State house (Job 600), University of Ghana Agric Village, the Workers Brigade at Teshie Nungua, part of Ghanatta Sec. School, Tema Community 7,8 and 9 basic schools, Oninku Drive Schools, Labone Estates, Nyaniba Estates, and Adenta Estates. He also worked on numerous construction projects in various cities and town across Ghana including Tamale, Kumasi, and Koforidua.

Mr. Nartey was considered one of the best estate construction contractors in the country. In the area of Road construction, Modern Ghana Builders undertook projects for several government Agencies including the Ghana Highway Authority, Dept. of Feeder Roads, Urban Roads, Cocoa Roads Projects, Afiencya-Dodowa Road, Amanse Town Road, some Cape Coast Town Roads, Winneba-Swedru Road, Akim Oda- Ofuase-Ntronang –Abirim Road, Cape Coast University Roads, Abura Jen-Jukwa Road, Agomeda-Aseseeso Road, Hohoe-Jasikan, and in Northern Ghana; the Sawla-Wa Road. As a patriotic man who loved his country and wanted to see it flourish, Mr. Nartey personally financed the construction of some of these roads. Examples include: Tsopoli-Old Ningo Road, Old Ningo-Anyaman-Ada Road, Koluedor-Toflokpo/Salom-Wudah Korpe, Dawhenya –Afiencya Road, and Tsopoli-Osuwem feeder Road, just to name a few.

## **LEADERSHIP AND RECOGNITION**

Mr. Nartey's leadership role is widely acknowledged by political, business, and local leaders. He served on several boards. Ghana as a nation has benefitted tremendously from his contributions in business and philanthropy.

Mr. WG Nartey's influence on the banking sector was recognized by the government at a workshop organized at GIMPA (Legon) on the theme "Banking and Strategic Planning." He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate (DR) Degree in Banking, in recognition of his contributions to the Banking sector in Ghana.

Mr. Nartey served on the executive board of the Great Ningo Traditional Council for several decades until recently, and his programs are being enjoyed by both Ningo nationals and outsiders. He also served as the Executive Chairman and patron of the United Nations Association (UN) – Ghana Branch and contributed greatly to the organization. He chaired several functions and gatherings.

Although, Mr. Nartey was not actively involved in politics, he had access to all the Presidents and Heads of States, and supported many development projects in the country. However, his enduring passion and focus was to improve the lives of the marginalized people of the Ga Adangbe region. He engineered the splitting of the Ga-Dangbe District into Ga and Dangbe District in 1972, with the Dangbe District Capital in Ada. Again in 1992, he ensured that the Dangbe District, which was vast and difficult to administer due to limited resources, was further divided into Dangbe West and Dangbe East Districts. Dodowa and Ada serving as the district capitals respectively.

Several years following this redistricting, funding was still not trickling down to the people as he had envisioned. He therefore constructed the basic logistics required to make Ningo a district in hopes that some development funds would be channeled through the District Assembly by the Government, to compliment and supplement his development agenda for his people. He personally embarked on funding some of the infrastructure necessary for development.

He provided a building complex to house the main officers of the District Assembly, which to date is used by the Ningo Traditional Council as administrative HQ of the Ningo Traditional Area. Parts of the complex, including a rest house and others are still lying idle, awaiting the full realization of his dreams. Had Mr Nartey succeeded in implementing his dreams, Ningo would today be counted among the major cities of Ghana. But as it is said, one sows, and another waters. May the seeds he has sown continue to be watered.

## PHILANTHROPY

There was no question that WG was passionate about the town of Ningo. He was committed to promoting the welfare and development of the Ningo area, particularly when Nene Narh Osroagbo Djangmah II was enstooled as the Paramount Chief of Ningo. With Nene's co-operation and support, Mr. Nartey brought several developments to Ningo. He worked hand in hand with the Paramount Chiefs in providing the following services and projects:

- 1964: masterminded the offering of 8,000 acres of land for the planned construction of Ghana's 2nd international Airport on Ningo land.
- 1965: constructed a complete Police station with barracks for the Ningo community on the private land offered to him and his brothers by Nene Teye Doku Aguda.
- 1967: established Ghana's 2nd largest salt factory at Old Ningo (Modern Salt Industry) to provide employment for the community.
- 1968: engineered the re-design of the Ningo Township, providing appropriate layouts and proper land use. In the same year, constructed the 1st Community Clinic for the town. He also provided street lights for the town from a generator installed on his own private residence. He later spearheaded the full electrification of the town.
- 1969: gave Ningo a facelift by constructing the community one and two bungalows, to provide housing for 28 families. In the same year, he established Star Chemicals Industries, a salt factory in Koluedor to create jobs for the area.
- 1969: with a passion for creating jobs for the youth, he started Star Fisheries Ltd in Tema
- 1972: initiated and funded the supply of tap water to the Ningo Communities, which was commissioned by Gen J.A. Ankrah, Head of State of Ghana (1966-1969).
- 1974: started the construction of a caustic Soda Factory off the Old Ningo Ahwiam Road, which unfortunately was never completed due to political instability in the country.

- 1976: inspired by his own past experience in education, decided to help Ningo children hampered by financial challenges, with access to secondary School education. Thus, the Ningo Secondary /Technical School was established with 8 students. The first classroom, dorms and teachers' housing were all housed within the walls of his private residence. The school now has a student and staff population of around 1,800. His vision for the school was to develop it into an Agricultural /Technical University.
- 1979 and 1981: political instability and coups during this time had a devastating effect on Mr. Nartey and his businesses. His detractors, competitors and other opportunists took advantage of the instabilities to damage his reputation and destroy all the investments he had made in his beloved Ningo. The situation was so dire that he had to flee into exile to save his life.
- 1984: after return from exile, Mr. Nartey, established Modern Warehousing and Shipping Services Ltd in Tema, the Hohoe and Sawla Stone Quarries. He also revamped Modern Ghana Builders into mainly Road construction. Around this time, he teamed up with some business friends to establish the Dangme Rural bank. For several years he continued to be a strong pillar in its administration and on at least two occasions rescued the bank from financial collapse. He remained the Technical Adviser to the Bank for many more years.
- 1989: The government awarded Mr. Nartey a contract to resurface several of the Cape Coast school campuses with asphalt. These included University of Cape Coast, Mfantipim School, Wesley Girls' High School, Holy Child School, St. Augustine College, Adisadel College, and Ghana National College.
- 2003: in his role as then treasurer of the United Nations Association of Ghana (UNAG), donated a three-square-mile land for a proposed Kofi Annan University in Great Ningo.

Beyond Ningo, Mr. Nartey was unmatched in philanthropy. He gave freely and regularly even in his old age. He supported every worthwhile cause that was brought to his attention. He built church auditoriums, schools and community centers. He helped many widows take care of their children.

It is not surprising that his great generosity also came with trouble and criticism from both his own people and outsiders. But he was never perturbed! He would always say: "No Fears! Who am I? I am nobody! Whatever I do, it is the Man up there who gives me power and ability to do it." He gave not to receive the accolades of men, but humbly knowing that all his blessings came from God.

## **FAMILY AND FAITH**

From his decision as a young man to leave school to take care of his mother, one cannot tell the story of WG Nartey without talking about how important family was to him. He was a proud and committed son, brother, father, uncle, grandfather and great grandfather to many. He grew up wanting what he saw as success - a big family with well-educated and successful children. It is common knowledge that WG did indeed have a large family with many children.

Mr. Nartey's wives were a critical part of his success. Their support gave him the stability and peace of mind he needed to grow and further his business aspirations. Some managed the home front and raised multiple children in addition to their own; and others helped manage his various business ventures. Many of them worked hand in hand with WG's siblings to hold down the fort while he was in exile. Their efforts were instrumental in keeping his enterprise alive while he was away.

While having a big family came with its own challenges and sometimes criticisms, it is clear that WG was proud of his family. He always had a few pictures of his children or grandchildren under his glass desk, as if to remind him of what is important in life.

WG took great pride in his children's accomplishments and supported their ambitions to the best of his abilities. In the interest of instilling the value of hard work, a few of his children and nephews had the opportunity to work with him in the business directly under his tutelage. He emphasized discipline and hard work and wanted all his children to be raised with similar values. To this end, he built a huge house in Accra with the intent of housing all his children to keep them closer to him. He wanted them to achieve more than he did, while avoiding his mistakes.

It is to his credit that many of his children can recall funny, heart-warming, or special moments they had with him individually. In his old age, nothing brought him more joy or pride than to spend time with his children and reminisce about their accomplishments. His words of wisdom and his easy-going nature will remain a comfort and a guide for them in his absence.

Mr. Nartey's faith was an important part of his life and was especially clear in how he handled difficult challenges with a calm demeanor. He was baptized into the Presbyterian Church in 1944 by Rev. Osabutey Agbedze while attending Ghanatta Senior High in Dodowa. Due to his very busy public life, Mr. Nartey did not attend church frequently, but acknowledged God as the source of all his blessings. He was a man whose faith in God was less about fancy words and more about depth of character. Given the many challenges he faced throughout his life, he remained cool under pressure, often acknowledging Jesus as his "senior brother."

WG never took for granted his faith in God nor his allegiance and dedication to the Presbyterian faith. He contributed enormously to the activities of the church in several communities, especially whenever he was called upon or had the opportunity to show his love. His generosity and desire to promote God's work did not end with his primary church alone, it spread to other churches, organizations, and communities, such as The Divine Healers Church, Lord's Vineyard, the Methodist Church, Assemblies of God, Pentecost, Ghana Apostolic, and the Roman Catholic Church. All these and more were dear to his heart. He was a patron to many church groups and supported them not only in substance but also attended meetings whenever he could.

A visionary, counselor, educator and a lifeline to many in need. Yet, in all these, Mr. Nartey remained humble and unassuming in faith, often saying "you have to try and do a little good to somebody every day" while you "learn to labor and learn to wait". He lived by these beliefs.

It is with a heavy heart but also with great gratitude to God for his long life that we say goodbye to the one and only WG Nartey. He was wise, smart, funny, and hard working. He was generous to a fault but also enjoyed the finer things in life - architecture, travel, and cars. He was blessed with family, friends, and work that he loved. Rarely will one meet a man who overcame so many adversities, but still managed to live life to the fullest.

WG was the definition of a self-made man, yet he would be the first to acknowledge the contributions of so many hundreds of people who have been part of his journey on this earth. His legacy lives on in the many who called him father, husband, grandfather, uncle, mentor, and friend.

Tseko Wuda – you were the undeclared, unannounced Emperor of the Nartey Family in Ghana and Abroad. Your life and achievements are beyond measure. So, although we mourn your departure, we also celebrate a long and historic life well lived!

We celebrate the achievements of this illustrious son of Ghana and Ningo; Wilson Gbli Nartey, Tseko Wudah, Manager, Kokotako: AYEKOOO!!!

You have done well, you have helped people, saved lives, played your part in Nation building and done more than a hundred sons could do. Many sons have done well but you surpass them all. The good intention of a person, in the interest of mankind is not immediately known until it is vanished.

You have left us quite a legacy. Your shoes can not be filled.

Tseko, Ya woou saminya.