

Aunt Janet was definitely the family rock star. She did so many interesting things, helped many people, traveled and met so many interesting and famous people that she really lived a full and exciting life. The whole family was curious as to where she was and what she was doing. We all kept her letters and have scrapbooks of articles about her from all over the world.

Lots of what I know about her is from family stories. Like the fact that she tried many things not necessarily sticking to any of them for long. She was an outstanding swimmer and could have trained for the Olympics. She also rode horses, but the most surprising activity was flying small planes. At the end of the Depression while Janet was at Michigan State, my grandparents would send her an allowance. My dad, working in the steel mills after college, would send her extra spending money, too. Somehow, she was always broke. No one knew why until they cleaned out her college room and found a flight log indicating that she'd spent all her money on flying lessons.

My grandmother, an excellent seamstress, used to make Janet gowns for all the fancy events she attended. Grandma once said Janet collected engagement rings. Janet left college, not finishing her degree, when the U.S. entered World War II. She came back to Chicago to train as a nurse at Cook County Hospital. An old family friend still remembers seeing Janet walking down a stairway in the hospital and still comments on how beautiful she was.

Janet left us with a strong sense of wanderlust. I've saved lots of the post cards she sent my parents and grandparents. One in particular is a Spanish dancer with a dress covered in blue thread. My favorite is from Mongolia, where she and Cheddi stayed in a ger in the Gobi Desert. My husband Steve once asked her who was the most interesting person she'd ever met? Her answer was Che Guevera.

My husband and I visited her twice in Guyana once staying at the home Cheddi had designed, and the second time with our daughter staying in the State House just a short time before Cheddi passed away. We won't forget sitting around the kitchen table in the State House with the President in shorts and a t-shirt discussing politics, nor taking the cars out in a Presidential motorcade to walk along the sea wall talking to people. It's hard to think of meeting a President and first lady in such a casual situation. Janet also took us to Starbroek Market where a merchant gave her a whole bunch of bananas, as she knew the President liked them. I remember twice going to the zoo in Georgetown with Janet who really loved animals. We even got to feed grass to the manatees in the pond outside the zoo. She always had dogs; Chow being an old family favorite, though we remember Elvis the dachshund who seemed to have the run of the entire city.

The three of us came to New York to see her address the United Nations as well as speak at Princeton and Columbia University. My last visit was this past summer when my husband and I went to Toronto where she stayed with cousin Nadira every summer. While she was physically not the same, she still got up and around and was politically interested in the world. We even walked around the Canadian side of Niagara Falls with her. In later years she reminded me of my grandmother Kate.

We will all have great memories of this interesting woman who did something significant with her life, but to those of us in the family, she was just Janet, my aunt.

Vicki Mann