

Remembering Cheddi

by Janet Jagan

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Cheddi the politician, the prolific writer, the commanding and eloquent orator, the statesman and the grass roots leader is well known to most Guyanese, both here and abroad.

However, on this, his birth Anniversary (March 22) I would like you to join me in remembering Cheddi Jagan, the warm - hearted husband, father, grandfather and family man.

He was a man who believed completely in women's rights, and at many times in my life, when I preferred a back seat, he would urge me to the front, as he did when I became a candidate in the 1947 elections and those thereafter. Even though he spent all his time writing, speaking and organising, he would help in the kitchen, wash dishes, carry out the garbage, etc. Unlike most Guyanese men, he accepted whatever meals and household arrangements were made without a grumble or a demand.

He loved working in the yard and planted many fruit trees. He got great satisfaction in watching the trees and plants grow and produce. How he enjoyed his home grown mangoes! It was a pleasure to watch him eating his mangoes. He had a favourite dungs tree and used to delight in picking the dungs which he took to Freedom House and gave the workers there, along with sugar cane he had cut.

He loved children and adored his five grandchildren. When three of them lived with us for a while at State House, he used to encourage them to eat local fruits and foods.

Each year during his presidency, on his birthday, at his request, the gates of State House were opened and a celebration took place, mainly aimed at children to which anyone could attend. The fair on the lawns of State House. This became an annual event to which hundreds of children attended and had a great time.

He used to appreciate immensely the hospitality shown to him when he moved around the country side. Homes were opened to him as he travelled and meals, which he greatly enjoyed, were in profusion. He never liked going to restaurants, always preferred home- cooked meals.

My grandson kept his lunch bag after he died. He must have been one of the few presidents in this world who carried his lunch to work. I used to prepare a snack, fruit and a flask of juice or coffee and put these in his lunch bag.

As to coffee, he remarked once -- and as I said earlier, he was rarely critical of meals -- that "Sis" at Freedom House made the best coffee. Mine couldn't match hers. I think he was right!

All five grandchildren used to love to go to his office at home (Bel Air) or the one at State House and swing in his hammock. He loved hammocks. The children used to play while he sat at his desk, and later they would "fight".

He used to play-fight with them and they loved the "roughing -up".

Cheddi was a well beloved man and played his role in national events as well as having a warm homelife. I think one of the most pleasant times was when we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary in 1993 with some 60 members of his family.

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