

"WHEN I WAS AT SCHOOL"

(Broadcast to Schools by Honourable Mrs. J. JAGAN,
Minister of Labour, Health and Housing - Xmas Term, 1958)

ooo000))(((000ooo

HELLO GIRLS AND BOYS I'd like to talk to you about my school days in the United States of America. I attended primary school in Chicago, Illinois, a very large industrial city in America. I went to the Bryn Mawr School where I spent eight years and then moved to high school and later university.

I can remember the school building well. It was a very large brick building, three floors high and divided into many classrooms. There was a big gymnasium where we learned games and various exercises. On the ground floor there was a large Assembly Room where we gathered once a week for lectures, films, singing, and so on. I can also recall what was to me a very dreadful part of the school - the principal's office. Here bad children were sent for discipline. I went there once, and was very much frightened. Once was enough for most children.

The school had a very large yard. On the northern side, the smaller children played, and on the southern side the older children played baseball and other games. We had a play period once a day in good weather. We would play there when we came to school early, or after school. We had many delightful hours running races and playing ball.

In the cold Winter months, many of us could not walk all the way home for lunch. I lived about twelve city blocks from school. In the very cold weather, our lips, noses, feet and hands would get so cold that they would hurt if we were out too long. In those months we would carry our lunch to school. I was very proud of my lunch box which held sandwiches and a small flask for something hot to drink.

Vacation periods are different for American school children, who get only a week off at Christmas and Easter but have two and a half months holiday in the Summer from mid June to September. I think in all, Guianese and American school children get about the same total holiday time.

In our/.....

In our classrooms we studied reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, history, geography, physical education and in the last two years, domestic science for girls and woodworking for boys. I learned a little of cooking and some sewing, and can well remember a pair of pyjamas I made. They were a little tight when I bent over, but I was terribly proud of them.

The history we studied was mainly the history of the U.S.A. In fact, I cannot recall being taught any other history. The geography, too, was mainly that of the U.S.A. We were taught to locate and know each of the 48 states of the U.S.A. and the capitals and main cities.

Some of the story books we read were somewhat different from those you use. We read stories of Greek and Norse mythology, Rip Van Winkle, Robinson Crusoe, King Arthur, Robin Hood as well as stories of American heroes. We memorised poems by well known poets and learned parts from famous speeches by Abraham Lincoln.

There were quite a few differences between the school I attended and the ones you attend. At Bryn Mawr, as in all American public schools, religion is not taught. Most children get their religious education at 'Sunday School' with the particular church to which the family belongs. At my school we did not use slates and slate pencils, but started out right away with pencils and paper as well as writing on the blackboard. The school provided us with books, so we did not have to purchase them as we do in British Guiana. We did not wear school uniforms and could wear any type of clothing we desired. The only uniform we wore was that for 'gym' as we called our twice weekly activities in the gymnasium. Those were wonderful periods we had at the gymnasium which was equipped with trapeze bars, rings, poles and various bits of apparatus for acrobatics. It also had a net for volley ball and indoor tennis as well as mats for tumbling and gymnastics. We went through drills, learned folk dances and throughout the years kept our bodies physically fit by exercise and games.

Hygiene was an important subject taught to us by use of films, lectures and demonstrations. We were urged to brush our teeth twice a day and bathe daily as well as wash our hands before eating. Much

emphasis was placed on clean hands and fingernails. Sometimes the teacher would suddenly have all of us put out our hands while she inspected them. Woe be to the child with dirty hands or fingernails ! Now that I am older, I understand why our teacher was so firm about that. For dirty hands can spread many diseases and unclean fingernails can lodge many germs, while also being very unsightly.

I think that one of the reasons why American people have quite good teeth is that they learn at a very early age the necessity of brushing their teeth after each meal, or at least twice a day. They also learn the correct way to brush their teeth, which is really very important. When your teacher shows you the right way to brush your teeth, pay close attention and be sure to do it the same way at home.

We were encouraged at school to take a keen interest in flowers, plants, trees, birds and insects. Living in a big city is not like living in the countryside. In some of the big cities like Chicago, most people see very little vegetation or animal life. For that reason, they treasure them more. We kept scrap books of pressed leaves and flowers, and had great fun identifying all the known trees and flowers. We made smoke prints of leaves by using candles and grease. This gives a black and white print on paper.

We sometimes visited the museum and zoo to see stuffed or live animals and birds, just as you do when you visit the museum in town and the zoo at the Gardens.

Two of the very important lessons I learned at primary school were road safety and cleanliness. Over and over and over again we were told how to cross the streets, how to walk safely and how to avoid accidents. 'Look in both directions before you cross the street' was drilled into our heads so much that we could never forget. And even if it is tedious, we all know how important it is to be careful on the roads. Every time I read in the newspapers that a child is killed in a road accident, I weep inwardly for the parents of that child and for the wonderful life that was blotted out. At school, the leading children in the upper forms were made traffic officers to stand at all the busy street corners where school children crossed, to guide the smaller children and help prevent accidents. I cannot emphasize how very important it is for each one of you to be careful.

Watch in both directions before crossing any street.

I said that cleanliness was another important lesson I learned well. One week in every year we had a campaign called 'keep the city clean'. During that week we were urged to clean up our yards, our streets, our school yards and playfields. We were told always to throw refuse, scraps and garbage into containers for that purpose. We did not do this only one week per year. We were always conscious of the need to keep our city clean, which meant keeping our own yards and alleyways clean as well as picking up any scraps we saw on the sidewalks and streets and throwing into waste bins. I would urge the same of you. Nothing is more ugly than a dirty city or a dirty village. It is not only the job of the street cleaners to keep a city clean, it is the responsibility of all who live or visit there. Think twice before throwing a scrap of paper in the street or a banana skin out the window. When we once get into the habit of keeping our city, village and yards clean, we will be better citizens for that.

Before I close, I might mention that when we came to the last year in primary school, our teacher interested us in listening to news on the radio and reading more in the papers and magazines than sports and comics. We discussed current events for about 15 minutes every day and were encouraged to express our views on various subjects. We learned then that beyond school, home and play, there was the larger world with its many opportunities.

ooo000)))(((000ooo