

Janet Jagan, the first genuine First Lady of Guyana and my fellow celebrants of this evening's occasion.

I was asked to fill in for a missing number on the entertainment list. I was worried about what I could do for I am not a certified dancer or singer ... then I remembered that October is Woman's History month and as a very old woman I may be able to entertain you with some reminiscing from the past.

More than half a century ago a young man from Port Mourant, in what was then British Guiana, went to the USA to study. He worked and studied for seven years, a lucky number, and qualified as a dentist.

~~Cheddi Jagan~~ then married Janet Rosenberg, a young, beautiful, blonde American woman. The marriage took place at Chicago City Hall.

Cheddi returned to British Guiana to set up his dental surgery and Janet joined him two months later.

Cheddi and Janet lived on Main Street in the City of Georgetown. People wondered about the beautiful blonde. An American living in a household with her husband's young brothers and sisters who had been brought from Port Mourant to Georgetown to further their education. The two cultures were different. However, Janet, the American, was adaptable to the point where she became such a member of Cheddi's family that her mother-in-law has said, "Janet is a goddess." That from an Indian mother-in-law ... or any other, is an unsurpassable compliment.

Janet found the bourgeois Georgetown society, sterile and boring. Together with two Guyanese women she formed the Women's Political Party and Economic Organization. It is not a secret that Janet's other name is organization. Politics became her concern because she knew that it was the only way to improve the life of the working class and the needy.

The Jagan's first child, Cheddi Bradlaugh, was born in 1947. Shortly after he became seriously ill and Janet endured a mother's anguish and anxiety when she took her son to New York for an operation that saved his life.

Janet and Cheddi worked with many others for the unity ^{+ welfare} of ~~Indians and Africans~~ ^{all Guyanese} and the welfare of all Guianese and in 1953 the People's Progressive Party won their first election to the dismay of the British Government.

Because of her intelligence, charm and humanity Janet was very popular in Georgetown and won a seat there in the ⁵³ elections. She was named Deputy Speaker.

A few months after ^{there was} ~~came~~ frustration and dejection when the British Government suspended the constitution. Two small British warships brought soldiers who enjoyed their visit to Guyana because they could find no disturbances except the Anglican bishop's nightmares of what he expected to happen.

When Cheddi broke the restriction order and was sentenced to six months imprisonment Janet would take their son to a friend's house where he could wave to his father who waved back, from behind the prison bars of his cell.

Shortly before Cheddi was released Janet was charged for holding a public meeting. She too was sentenced to six months imprisonment and the British Government, with an appalling display of spite, arranged that she should be imprisoned before Cheddie was ^{freed} released. Though friends attempted to hide her until Cheddie was released she selflessly gave herself up rather than implicate others.

So it happened that an American woman ^{in 1954} was jailed in a Guianese prison. Her fellow prisoners were minor criminals and prostitutes. The Woman Superintendent of the prison brought her bits of cloth ~~with~~ which she fashioned into beautiful costume dolls. A little stuffed white rabbit that she made was somehow delivered to her little four year old son on his birthday. Janet could not adjust to the prison diet of saltfish and local vegetables and when she was released she was very pale and drawn, her cheeks were blotched and she was painfully thin. Her spirit had gone through fire but she remained dedicated to her beliefs.

In the mid 50's her beautiful daughter Nadira was born and Janet nurtured her children while continuing the political struggle.

The PPP party achieved its second victory in 1957. Janet won the Essequibo seat and became a Minister in the Government.

During these years her early popularity waned in the city as she became a target for the opposition parties. The whipping post for their malice. *She ignored them and continued on her chosen path.*

In 1961 she added the extra work for the elections to her heavy load of duties. The blonde ^{was} ~~had become~~ the busiest bee. *+ the British Government.*

One night during pre-election she called on a friend to take her to Buxton Village, the P.N.C., stronghold, which was risky for her to visit in a car that was not in fit working order.. Said the friend, "Me? Buxton? t night. I'm not that crazy." "Then I', off." she said. Her friend gave in at the thought of Janet, alone on a dark night stuck in a broken down car in Buxton. They returned from Buxton without mishap. Janet laughed.

There was victory again for the P.P.P. in 1961, but the price of victory was ~~gm~~ high. With help from abroad the opposition parties did their worse in ~~inciting~~ ^{+ loss} destructive disturbances, strikes and rioting which spread fear ~~and~~ distress throughout Guyana. *Buxton Freedom House*

During ~~these years~~ ¹⁹⁶³ a bomb was ^{placed} left on a counter ^{in the Freedom House} immediately below Janet's office ~~on a counter in the bookstore~~. Michael Ford, a clerk in the store, suspicious of a forgotten parcel in tense times, picked it up and ran to throw it in the open yard. The bomb exploded blowing Michael to bits. *in remembrance was re-named the Michael Ford Bookstore* The bookstore ~~is now~~ named after him.

Then came the elections of 1964 and the long years of a corrupt PNC Government destroying Guyana, ^{infamous} rigged elections kept the PNC in power.

Janet continued on as a member of the ~~P.P.P.~~, the party in opposition. ^{the} Last October on Election Day ¹⁹⁸² Freedom House was attacked ^{by} wild and rampaging P.N.C. supporters ^{Janet} she refused to leave and remained in the building with other stalwarts of the P.P.P.

Janet reads widely and well .It is one of her greatest pleasures. She is also a fine writer and has been the editor of the Mirror for many decades. Such writing however does not allow her to create stories so she has written stories for her 5 grandchildren as gifts for their birthdays and at Xmas. Very soon a book of children's stories by her may be published.

Telling you of these few happenings may give you some insight into the character of an exceptional woman.

Cheddie has said of her "She is an introvert who prefers to remain out of the limelight." Those who know her are aware that the statement is true. Nevertheless ^{the caring & ever generous woman} she carries on regardless of her preference for anonymity with dedication and great courage.