

Memories of Janet by Jean Jagan

I remember Janet with very fond memories. She came to Guyana I believe in 1943. The first time I met her was when she was working as a receptionist at Cheddi's dental office. It was called Co-operative Dental Supplies then. My husband Naipaul (Naip), Cheddi's brother, was the dental technician at that office- trained by Cheddi and his other dentist brother, Sirpaul. Janet was a strong believer in education and especially for women. I think, me being a teacher was one of the reasons we got along so well. She was wholly responsible for basically all of Cheddi's brothers and sisters coming to Georgetown from Berbice to go to school and eventually going abroad to study. They were all supported by Cheddi, Sirpaul and Naip but it was Janet who made sure they all got a good education. Some stayed/ lived with Janet but most stayed/lived at differing times at my house after Naip and I got married. In fact Janet hosted my wedding at her house- a very small affair- but made a lot of the snacks herself- like prunes stuffed with peanut butter which was quite fancy for that time.

She was always busy but she and Cheddi enjoyed coming to my house at Christmas for black cake, plantain chips and gingerbeer. She and I exchanged Christmas gifts. I would do cross stitch towels for her and she would give me books. She was fond of me and my family. Our kids grew up together. I remember when she was Minister of Health and my son Nigel was terribly ill as an infant and no one could figure out what was wrong with him, she suggested the correct diagnosis of appendicitis and made sure he got the best care.

Yes, she was a busy public figure but when my husband died suddenly at age 45 of a heart attack, she would come over often just to talk and keep me company. Later on in life, when my daughter married an American, and they were both working in Guyana, she and my son in law, Tom, became very close. He was from an area close to Chicago where she grew up so she loved reminiscing about things with him. She would be at their house once a week for dinner as she really got along well with him. She loved to read and he loved to read. Her stories about all the places she travelled to was always so interesting for them and for me.

I think it was nice for her to have this little american connection in Guyana. But in her heart, she was Guyanese and endeared herself to the people. In fact, the Indo Guyanese referred to her as their 'Blue eyed Bhougie'.

For me, she was Janet and she was family.