

Dear Friends, fellow Guyanese,

Much has been said about my mother in her political life but there were also many other aspects of her life that made her such an amazing and beautiful human being, that you may not know of.

First and foremost, for me was that she was a very kind, loving and generous mother who even though she had a very busy political life while I was still very young, managed to spend her spare time with my brother, Joey and I. She took us to the Georgetown zoo and the botanical gardens which always held a very dear place in her heart. She also really loved taking us to the sea wall, where we would walk on the beach and collect shells and driftwood. She used to use the drift wood to make pieces of art. Later in life she also enjoyed taking all the grandchildren to see the animals of Guyana at the zoo and to the sea wall.

Her favourites at the zoo were the Harpy Eagle, the Manatee, the Water Dog and the Cockatoo, some of the very animals she so fondly wrote about in her children stories for her grandchildren – Cheddi, Alex, Vrinda, Natasha and Avasa. She also wrote beautiful stories for my brother's birthday while she was in jail, and a few personal poems for us, along with the other political ones she wrote.

Our family also spent many memorable and fun days at the redwater creeks and on the beach at Bee Hive, with fried chicken as one of Mom's specialties for these trips. She made the best fried chicken.

These were times when my parents were able to relax and enjoy time with us and other family members or with friends.

My mother had a great love for the arts, which I learned began way back when she was a child of about 11. She told that she would walk far distances and travel alone on buses to visit the art museums in Chicago and to go to the beach. Telling me about it she said she was actually amazed that her parents had allowed her at that age to travel around alone.

Over the years she bought paintings and works of art by Guyanese artists, sometimes just because she wanted to help them along financially and to encourage them.

She was instrumental in the creation of Castalini House and in collecting art for it.

My mother has sacrificed many things in her life. I think one of the first that I know about was her decision to get married to my father.

She was studying nursing at the time and she told me of her love for surgery and that if she had continued, she would have been a surgical nurse, but she gave this dream up when she decided to get married, for in those days you could not be married and be a nurse.

I think that's why one of the issues when she fought for women's rights in British Guiana, was that women should be able to have any job and also be married.

My mother would have been a very kind and caring nurse had she completed her studies. At my father's dental practice, she was his assistant and made toys to give to the kids that were his patients.

When she joined my father in British Guiana in December 1943 she was introduced to a completely new way of life.

She readily accepted my father's wish to help his brothers and sisters. Many of them came to live with them, while they attended high school and later with my parents help, they were all able to attain higher education. Some of them would only have been 2 to 4 years younger than her at the time.

A very dear friend of my mother, Evelyn Rayman told me how she remembered seeing this slim, beautiful white woman and she could not understand how she could take in all these relatives and have to live in such a small place, after coming from such a place as America.

She went to jail for 6 months. She wrote about this period: "Jail wasn't easy from the physical point of view. But like my husband, I treasured the quiet of jail from the furor outside. I did a lot of reading after insisting that women, like men, should have a right to have books. I also did handicrafts and my stuffed dolls and animals were sold outside."

My mother was very athletic as a young adult. She was a speed skater, and also loved archery and target shooting but one of her biggest passions was swimming, which she continued to do until the summer of 2008, the last year she spent with us in Canada.

She carried this love for sports into her political efforts here in Guyana – she and my father made many private pools available to local swimmers, encouraged the youth, both male and female to participate in all forms of sports.

Because these things were so dear to her heart, one of the first things that she did when she became President was to set up a new ministry – The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in 1997.

My mother was a very generous person as many can attest to. She loved to send out birthday cards and give gifts to close party comrades and their children.

I could not count how many persons she has helped over the years – either to find solutions to their problems, to help them get a house lot, to find a place to live, to get a job and even to help them financially in any way she could, sometimes even leaving herself short.

My mother was a very loving and dedicated wife. My parents had a very close relationship and worked very well together. They complemented each other in all aspects of life. Dad was the outgoing one, my mother preferred to be in the background, but really and truly she also did a lot

of work in campaigning in the countryside especially in the Essequibo region where she was always very popular.

Mom took care of the finances and the running of the house. She cooked the meals and cleaned the house but they also had an equal division of labour in the house. Daddy would clear up and wash up the dishes and polish our wooden floors when it needed to be done. He also took care of the yard and the planting of fruit trees which was a joy for him.

Theirs was a quiet life together in our house at New Haven after my brother and I had left home, so many years ago. On Sundays – the only day off if they did not have meetings in the countryside – was spent quietly.

The mornings would begin with Dad in the yard and Mom cleaning the house. Lunch was Mom's Sunday meal of roast chicken, stuffing and lots of fruits for Dad. After lunch they would both have a nap then they would sit together on the veranda or go to the sea walls for a walk. They loved to do this and also took my children there many times.

In the evening after dinner, Dad would end up at his desk where he wrote so many of his hundreds and hundreds of articles, papers and books. Mom would sit and read a book – she loved reading and has left a large library of books on all sorts of topics – the classics, foreign writers, biographies, fiction, politics to name a few. Sometimes she would be reading several books at a time. She wrote “By taking me to the library when I was a little girl, my father gave me one of the greatest blessings I have ever had – a love of books. Reading has been one of the great joys of my life and one, which I recognise, has carried me through periods when life was not always what I had hoped for.”

This was their life together, a loving couple who were able together to make so many positive changes to the lives of so many in Guyana.

I am happy that over the last years when Mom was no longer deeply involved in politics, she was able to spend longer periods of time when she visited me and my family. I got to do things with her that in earlier years we could not.

I would take her out shopping especially to the grocery store where she spent a long time – the choices were many, compared to back home - to plays and museums in Toronto, out for dinners and just sitting around and talking about life in general.

She continued to encourage me to design and make jewellery, which she loved to wear, especially pieces that I had made for her. It was out of her love for jewellery that I probably decided to take on that profession.

I miss her terribly. Our family will miss her. I know anyone who had the joy to have met her and really knew who she was will miss her.

I would like to thank you all today for coming out to pay tribute to this great lady. I hope when you visit Guyana you will visit the house where my parent's lived, which I have opened up to the public, the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre and also visit our website dedicated to both their lives at jagan.org.

Nadira Jagan-Brancier