

## Reply to Questions by McGill University Student to Janet Jagan

### Personal Background

My parents were both born in the USA. On my mother's side, her parents were born in Hungary and Romania. On my father's side, they lived in Missouri for 2-3 generations, coming from Poland and Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I have one brother, older by 3 years. We had a comfortable family relationship with few problems that I can remember. My primary and half of my secondary education took place in Chicago, where I was born. My family moved to Detroit where I finished my secondary education and enrolled at the University of Detroit, a Jesuit University where I concentrated on the sciences. At Wayne University I studied mainly social sciences and at Michigan State College, maths and sciences.

Religion has played a very minor role in my life. My parents and grandparents were not religious and I learned very little of the Jewish religion from them. I left for Guyana in 1943 and during my 50-odd years here, I have had almost no contact with Judaism or Jewish people, so there are no such influences in my life of any significance, except my hatred and defiance of religious and racial prejudices and discrimination.

My mother was a housewife and my father a salesman in heating and plumbing. I studied Spanish, but do not really have a command of the language. I never travelled abroad or lived abroad as a child.

I grew up in the middle class. I have no military experiences or background. My daughter is a jeweller, my son a dentist. As a youth I was very athletic and took part in many competitive sports. As an adult, I have been interested in the arts and worked to preserve the National Art Collection and the establishment of the Castellani House National Art Gallery. I have also written several children's stories which have been published.

### **"Path to Power"**

Not sure of first question as I never "chose to work professionally." I am not a "professional worker." I entered political life in Guyana at the grass roots level, through the trade union movement and assisted in the formation of the country's first stable political party, of which I served as General Secretary for 20 years.

I've never worked for any company or business. Throughout my political career which began in 1946, I became, off and on, engaged in journalist activities and gradually developed into a journalist, by experience. During 1950-57 I edited the PPP's official organ "Thunder", a monthly, then a weekly and later a quarterly. In 1973 and up to the time I became Prime Minister, I wrote for and edited "Mirror" Newspaper – a weekly, a daily and now a bi-weekly.

I'm not sure what aspect of my background is considered helpful to me as a leader. I know that my nursing experience and science studies helped me become a good Health Minister, but that aside, my experiences from the time I moved to Guyana at 23 years of age helped to form me as a political leader. I would say experience, constant activities, discussions and decision-making at the Executive Committee of the PPP throughout all the years are the basis of what I have become.

I accepted the nomination as a Candidate of the Party for the Presidency as a duty to my Party, to help win the first elections after Dr. Jagan's death and continue his policies and ideas.

There was little opposition to me as a Presidential Candidate because of my gender. The PNC, the major opposition party, used my race and place of birth as key issues – throughout the campaigning and during my Presidency. I don't believe my gender was a factor. I have been around so long, involved in so many of the nation's battles and problems that my sex seems to have been a minor issue. On the other hand, women in the opposition camp did not regard my gender as an asset; they were mostly concerned with my race and origins.

My strongest support, and the support the PPP has always gained, is from the workers and farmers, mainly in the rural areas.

Like most members of the PPP, Cheddi Jagan was our mentor. That included me. I don't believe that my gender was a major factor in the elections except for the fact that in some instances, I was regarded as a maternal figure – “Mother of the Nation” was a designation sometimes used. I don't think being a woman “helped or hindered” my election. The Party won the elections. (Unlike US elections, it is not the presidential candidate, but the Party's list of Candidates which counts) because of what was achieved during Dr. Jagan's terms of office, what the PPP has done all the years fighting for people's rights, etc. The campaign was not a personalized one – as in US – it was the combined efforts of many.

### **Leadership**

I find this section difficult to answer.

### **Wisdom**

For women to be leaders they have to be tough, caring, willing to listen, able to make decisions without procrastination and to keep the peace by consultation and understanding. Major challenges facing the world are to keep the peace, avoid bloody confrontations, solve the poverty problem. In Guyana, we have internal problems that we are facing and need to achieve national unity and an end to poverty.

There is a need for a better distribution of wealth, for the North and the South to find a modus vivendi. The quality of life can never improve without a solution to poverty and war.

It's different to pat the back of any present political leader. The world needs more dedicated leaders.

Janet Jagan 11/26/99

## QUESTIONS ON JANET JAGAN

### Personal Background

- The country/culture of origin of her mother and father
- The number of siblings
- Birth order
- Her role in the family growing up
- The relationship with her mother, father, siblings, other family members, peers
- Was she educated in any other countries besides the USA?
- I know she attended many universities ( U. of Detroit, Wayne U., Michigan State College, and the Cook County School of Nursing), but what did she study at each of these?
- How important is her religion to her? How does Judaism influence her leadership style, if at all?
- Her mother and father's occupations?
- Does she speak any other languages? Which ones?
- Did she travel internationally as a child? Live abroad?
- As an adult, where has she travelled (internationally)? Has she lived abroad (other than Guyana, of course)? Has she worked abroad?
- In which socio-economic class did she grow up?
- Does she have any military experience/background?
- What are her children's occupations? ( I have heard that you are an author and jeweller? Your brother is a politician?)
- Any other interesting stories/facts about her family?
- extracurricular activities she participated in as a child? As an adult?
- Any major obstacles she overcame as a child and/or as an adult?

### Path to Power

- Why did she initially choose to work professionally?
- What companies has she worked for? Positions?
- Which aspects of her background does she consider most helpful to her as a leader?
- Did she accept to take the position of President in order to continue the work of your father, President Cheddi Jagan? To accomplish her vision?
- What was the country's reaction to her (a woman) running for President? What were men's reactions, in particular? What was the media's reaction?
- Which groups within society were her strongest supporters?
- Did she have any mentors? What did she learn from them?
- In which ways did being a woman help or hinder her from getting the position of President?
- What was the most interesting story that the press told about her?

### Leadership

- How does she describe an effective leader? Define power?
- How does she describe her own leadership style?
- How has she been compared to her male counterparts?
- What were her visions for the world? Her country? Her community? Her family?
- In which ways is she most outstanding? What are her greatest accomplishments and recognition?
- In which ways has being a woman helped her to lead more effectively?

### Wisdom

- What leadership advice has she given you (being her daughter)?
- What advice would she give a woman successor?
- What does she see as the major challenges facing the world and Guyana today?
- What does she think the world's leaders should be doing to improve the quality of life in the world? Which political leaders does she feel are doing this most effectively?

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