



Outing to the Guyana Mangrove Restoration Project By Carole Maison Bishop

A bus rolling sedately along the East Coast Demerara road on the morning of Saturday March 14, 2015 may not have seemed an unusual sight to some persons travelling the same route. In fact to the uninitiated, it may just have been a group of persons on their way to a "church outing". But for the small group travelling in the vehicle ahead and the occupants of the bus, this was no ordinary trip, but the ANNUAL OUTING of the "Senior Class" of the BHSOSA.

The trip, eagerly anticipated every year by the seniors, was to the Guyana Mangrove Visitors' Centre at Cove and John. While not openly admitting it, very few of us had a good idea of what it was all about. There were of course those who, exhibiting an air of persons whose knowledge was a cut above the rest, sought to "educate the uninformed". That information was, in fact, not all that accurate but that is unimportant.

Members of the Project Staff greeted us warmly. The screen, projector and other apparatus in place pointed to a high level of their preparedness. From the presentation, we learnt that Guyana Mangrove Restoration Project (GMRP), a partnership between the Government of Guyana and the European Union, is one of a number of similar initiatives worldwide. Implemented by our Ministry of Agriculture, it is designed to respond to climate change and mitigate its effects through the protection, rehabilitation and wise use of Guyana's mangrove ecosystems.

The video presentation showed a number of initiatives in countries with similar ecosystems. This made us (more) aware of the fragility of our environment and the care that we must take of it, as in a sense our very survival depends upon it. The lively question and answer period that followed provided even more information. In the end, we all agreed that we must be mindful of the need to maintain the protective function, values and biodiversity of mangrove forests.

By lunch time, there was general consensus that the day was proceeding very well as indeed we had all anticipated. The Seniors Committee ensured that lunch lived up to the usual high standard and we were all appreciative.

The Women's Cooperative in the area which operates a small facility on the premises must have been very pleased as its usual stock of pepper sauce, guava jelly and other commodities was depleted in a short time. Although additional stock was sourced, there were those among us who came away empty handed. We were then ready to continue on the Guyana Mangrove Heritage Trail Tour.

After some skilful manoeuvring on the part of our bus driver (there were times when we felt certain we would end up in a canal and were already envisioning the attendant headlines in the relevant national media), we arrived at the foreshore safe and sound. There, we learnt more about GMRP and were also allowed to examine some of the mangrove specimens.

The drummer on hand provided the requisite ambience. It is not clear if it was the wine imbibed during the lunch or if some other fermented beverage was being circulated in the benab at the foreshore under the guise of soda and water was the stimulus. What is certain is that when national as well as queh queh songs were thrown into the mix, the singing was lusty and loud if slightly off key. It was easy to separate the "urban" from the "rural" participants. The former were distinguished by their display of enthusiasm but nothing else, while the latter engaged in some genuine queh queh moves that earned the admiration of the onlookers.

The promise of a ride on a dray cart seemed to excite a number of the seniors, although to be fair, those who were born and raised in an urban environment seemed the more excitable. The rides provided much hilarity, excitement and in some cases anxiety and trepidation. But all ended well. When it was finally time to set off on the journey home, there was consensus that it had been a day well spent.

WE CAN NOW BETTER APPRECIATE THOSE "SAVE THE MANGROVES" BILLBOARDS ERECTED ALONG OUR HIGHWAYS.



Seniors Texting Codes

ATD - At the doctor's
BFF - Best friends funeral
BTW - Bring the Wheelchair
BYOT - Bring Your Own Teeth
CBM - Covered by Medicare
CUATSC - See You at the Senior Center
DWI - Driving While Incontinent
FWIW - Forgot Where I Was
GGPBL - Gotta Go, Pacemaker Battery Low

GHA - Got Heartburn Again
HGBM - Had Good Bowel Movement
LMDO - Laughing My Dentures Out
LOL - Living on Lipitor
OMSG - Oh My! Sorry, Gas
TOT - Texting on Toilet
WAITT - Who Am I Talking To?
GGLKI (Gotta Go, Laxative Kicking in!)

I am not afraid of tomorrow for I have seen yesterday and I love today.

Noah's Ark: Everything I need to know, I learned from Noah's Ark.

ONE: Don't miss the boat.

TWO: Remember that we are all in the same boat!

THREE: Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.

FOUR: Stay fit. When you're 60 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.

FIVE: Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.

SIX: Build your future on high ground.

SEVEN: For safety's sake, travel in pairs.

EIGHT: Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.

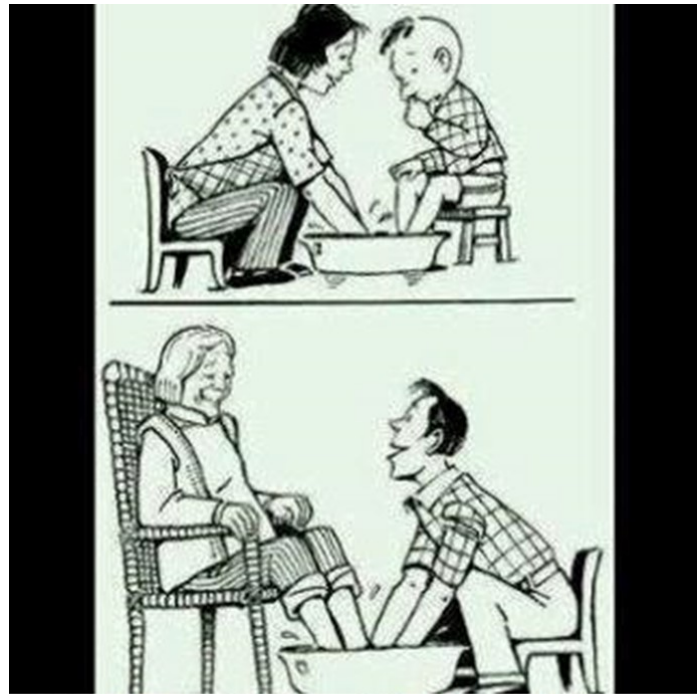
NINE: When you're stressed, float awhile.

TEN: Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.

ELEVEN: No matter the storm, there's always a rainbow waiting.



One of the best feelings in the world is knowing that your presence and absence both mean something to someone.



Like this if you love your mom

Meet the Seniors

Leila Too Kong née Beramsingh

Leila Too Kong née Beramsingh is the eldest of eight children of Montrose Mongul and Lily (née Rambaran) Beramsingh. Her father was the owner and principal of Modern High School. Her mother was an avid reader, a seamstress and a great volunteer. Leila helped her mother with cake sales at church and in women's groups.

Leila was her father's favourite child and liked the same things he did. She remembers being up at 3 am with her father to listen to a Joe Louis boxing match on the radio when she was five years old. It is no surprise, then, that she accompanied her husband to the Georgetown Cricket Club (Bourda) to witness several boxing fights, often being the only woman there.

Leila placed first in the country at the scholarship examination at age 10 years, gaining a place at the Bishops' High School where she was placed in Victoria (Dewar) House. She was one of 21 government-sponsored children in the Third Form which included three Chinese and three East Indian students. During the period 1944 to 1952, Leila played netball, lawn tennis, hockey (centre forward). She acted in "The Importance of Being Earnest" and one other play. Her best friend was Marlene Kwok Crawford.

The staff consisted of 27 teachers from England and three Guyanese – Lilian Dewar, Lucille Campbell and Syble Kranenburg Douglas. The Headmistress, Aileen Allen, had striking black eyes. At every term end, she required all the children to shake her hands and look into her eyes to gain social confidence. The English teacher invited the Sixth Form students to her home for tea and coffee.

Leila was not averse to bending the rules. One day, Leila put nail polish on one of her fingers. For this, she was ejected from the Art class. While outside, Mr. Allen came by and warned Leila that Mrs. Allen was on her way. He sent her to hide around the corner of the building. She also colluded with other students in pranks. While in Fifth Form, she and her classmates celebrated Matriculation results by going to Brown Betty (the ice-cream store) then to the seawall. Mrs. Allen wanted to know what they were celebrating since: "(T)his is only the second step up in your life". Leila and all the other students decided to imitate Mrs. House who wore two "rat tail plaits" by wearing two plaits one day. Mrs. House obviously made an impression as Leila remembers her dropping her cigarette outside the gate and that the students called Mr. House's silver Ford the "Silver Clipper."

Although Leila was offered places at the University College of the West Indies and one other university, that was not the path she chose much to the disappointment of her father. Alas, Leila went to a steelband party for the Australian Cricket team at Bookers Sports Club and met Stanley Too Kong. That led to a 60+ year relationship.

As the wife of a government doctor, Leila was exposed to different living conditions in several parts of Guyana. She travelled up creeks and rivers and to Amerindian villages upland. This gave her a love for the creeks' black water, the silence of the interior, the peace, fresh air and space.

She climbed to the top of Kaieteur Falls twice from Tukeit at its foot; her husband accompanied her on the second trip. She also travelled by plane all over the interior.

Leila lived in places such as Suddie, Fort Wellington, Eccles and Cove and John where she spent 16 years and where her three daughters were born. At one stage, Leila moved eleven times in two years. She travelled by railway, boat and road and lived at times without electricity.

Life in country areas did not upset her. In fact, she became self-taught in crochet and knitting and sewed her own clothes. She planted fruit trees wherever she lived and reaped giant tomatoes and sweet peppers using hydroponic methods first seen at Atkinson Field, reared chickens and collected eggs which she sold to small restaurants. She has devoted much time to nurturing orchids.



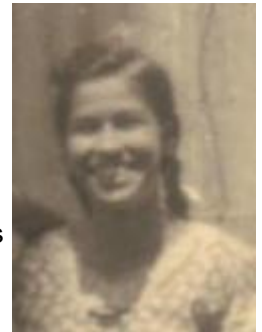
Leila went to England by ship, spending one year there when her husband took leave. She remembers seeing "the whole of Barbados" from the ship. There was no wharf; only tenders to shore three miles off.

During the 80-day strike, Leila travelled to Georgetown to find the city on fire. One image that stuck with her was that of a man walking with a refrigerator on his back. It was all a surprise as she had no batteries for their radio while in Suddie so was unaware of the activities throughout the country.

Like her mother, Leila has been active in non-governmental organizations. She has served as Board Member of YWCA, Gentlewomen's Relief Association and Indian Ladies Club. She also sat on the Management Committee of the Georgetown Cricket Club. In addition, Leila has functioned as a counsellor at Help & Shelter, an organization which addresses domestic violence and as a Sunday School teacher at Burns Memorial. She represented the YWCA in British Columbia while President.

When Dr. Too Kong became ill in 1997, Leila was encouraged by Doreen De Caires to work at Stabroek News. She agreed and served as a Proofreader and Part-time Editor for 15 years.

Leila's two sisters, Patricia Gauci and Joyce Bouquillon and three daughters, Tessa, Jacqueline (Fletcher) and Romaine attended BHS.



Jean Small née Thomas

Jean Small née Thomas continues to shine in her beloved areas of the French Language and Theatre Arts. Her devotion to teaching, the performance arts and creative writing has led to the enhancement of the lives of many students, colleagues and audiences as well conferment of several awards.

The most recent recognition of Jean's prowess came from the Government of France which awarded her the Chevalier dans l'Ordre national de la Legion d'Honneur, the highest honour given to a non-national of France; this award was instituted by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802 and is given for a minimum of 20 years of public service or 25 years of professional activity, and "eminent merits". The Government of France previously decorated Jean with the Order of Officier in 2004 for having been a founder-member of the Jamaica Association of French Teachers, for participating in the theatre festival in Avignon in 2002 and as a "femme de theatre" and awarded her the Chevalier des Palmes Academiques for distinguished teaching of French Language and Literature in 1985.

The daughter of Trevelyan and Matilda Thomas, Jean attended Moravian Primary School from which she proceeded to the Bishops' High School in 1944. A member of Mary House, Jean learned in the company of girls such as Waveney Trotman, Holly Morgan and Dawn Elvis. It was at BHS that Jean's love of French and acting was honed. She participated in plays at BHS. She won the Middle School Scholarship in 1949 and the Senior School Scholarship in 1951.

Jean majored in Foreign Languages at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona, an institution to which she returned in 1992 as the Secretary of the Creative Arts Centre. Prior to this, she taught French in Guyana, Nigeria, Australia and Jamaica, serving at Immaculate Conception High School in Jamaica for 20 years. Her career also entailed teaching French in the Modern Languages Department of UWI and the University of Guyana and serving as a Lectrice d'Anglais (English teacher) for one year in Guadeloupe.

At UWI, Jean championed the name change of the Creative Arts Centre to the Philip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts (PSCCA) and the title of Secretary to Tutor-Co-ordinator, making her the first female Tutor-Co-ordinator. She spearheaded several innovations including courses in Writing Stories For Children, Voice and Speech, Nail Technology, Fashion Designing, Floral Arrangement which provided the necessary financial stability of the Centre. She created programmes such as the first ever **Dubfest**, a monthly eclectic programme called **An Evening of Excellence**, **Kreative Kidz**, a summer programme for children as well as a monthly **Creative Market Place** which enabled craft producers to display and sell their creations on the lawns of the PSCCA. She



realized her desire to create two performance spaces running concurrently at the PSCCA, the main theatre and an alternative performance space in The Round equipped with seating and lighting. Achievement of the first enabled her to direct Simone Schwartz-Bart's play "Mon Beau Capitaine" in French and English on alternative weekends. She performed her play "Le Conte d'Une Femme Noire" in the theatre and in "Hospice" with Barbara McCalla in The Round.

Since 2000, Jean has directed a play in French every year with the students of the Modern Languages Department of UWI for the Intercampus Foreign Language Theatre Festival. She was the first Convenor of the Modern Languages Panel of the Caribbean Examinations Council and served as the External Examiner of French and Drama for the Joint Board of Teacher Education for many years. She taught Drama from 1977 to 1988 at the Jamaica School of Drama where she devised a course titled "A Caribbean Laboratory" to explore the use of Caribbean Folk Forms as the base of an aesthetic for Caribbean Theatre.

Her memorable performances were acting as a student at UWI in the first full-length French play, **Antigone**, as Cordelia in **King Lear**, as the psychiatrist in the premiere of **Agnes of God** and acting in her own play **A Black Woman's Tale** which was selected as the best Jamaica play in 1998 for the World Cup Series of Playwrights in France. She has performed internationally in Suriname, Toronto, Liverpool, France, Antigua, and Guyana.

Jean is currently the Chair of the Fine Arts Board of the University Council of Jamaica and the Chair of the proposed National Foreign Languages Board of Jamaica in the Ministry of Education. She earned the Doctor of Philosophy degree from UWI in 2011.

