

## Remembering my Parents

by Nadira Jagan-Brancier

Dear Friends,

March is a month that brings back many happy memories, most of all, March 22 when we celebrated my father's birthday. But March is also a month that holds my saddest memories – my father's illness and finally his death on March 6, 1997 and my mother's death last year on March 28, 2009.

As we remember them both this month, I would like us not to dwell on their deaths, but to remember and celebrate their lives and how they have impacted on all our lives, the differences their sacrifices have made for us all and what we as a country have gained by their struggles for a better way of life for all Guyanese and for the world as a whole, not only on political and economic issues but also on the cultural life of our country.

I am very proud to have had such wonderful parents. They were warm and loving, kind and caring but also sometimes stern parents. Although they were very busy with their political work, helping not only the people of Guyana, but also lending support to the struggles of others the world over, they found the time to spend quality time with my brother and me, and later with their grandchildren. Growing up they were not the kind of parents that would sit around with you for hours and chat or watch TV – unless it was about the news or politics. We had great times with them at the beach at Bee Hive, Red Water Creek, the Sea Wall, visits to other countries and sometimes just along for the ride, going to meetings across the country.

As an adult whenever I was home, especially late at night, while my father was working (he always worked late into the night), he would stop and take a break, and I would sit by his side and talk about all sorts of things. If I had a problem, he would come up with all kinds of solutions, as I am sure many of you who knew him personally would have had the same experiences. Some of the best times spent with my father were those evening talks, just us, alone together.

He was also a kind, loving and playful father. He was such a lovely person. He had a great sense of humour and you could say something and he would laugh and joke around. I have this great photo of him with an urni on – the kind my grandmother used to wear – he looks a lot like her in it - he is laughing and he has the most beautiful smile. I look at it every time I sit down to work. When I think of my father (and that's a lot of the time), I always remember his happy and cheerful face, with that wonderful and beautiful smile. As you know that smile was not only for his family, but for the world.

Both my parents traveled quite a bit but never at the same time. While Mom was away Dad and I would go to the cinema to see Indian movies, usually to the late show or to the drive-in – I remember Sangam and Dosti as the most beautiful ones.

Over the last 13 years by working on my father's papers, I have come to know so much more about this passionate freedom fighter, this messenger for world peace and the eradication of poverty, this brilliant and dedicated politician named Cheddi Jagan, who I am lucky enough to call my father.

I am amazed by the amount of work my father was able to accomplish in his lifetime. The quantity of his written work is overwhelming. When I think I have photocopied all the papers for a given year I still find more. I look back at some of those years and wonder how he was able to write so much, be an active politician here in Guyana, participate in world events overseas and also be such a loving son, husband, father, brother and grandfather.

My mother was a very loving, kind and generous person. She was the one who encouraged me to do the things I wanted, when others thought they were not possible. I will always cherish and love the times we spent together, especially over the last 13 years since my father died. She was more vulnerable then, being alone and missing my father tremendously. But she carried on with her work as President. You would not know this but several times as President she was very ill, with a very high fever, but she insisted on going to whatever meeting or function she had to. Even during the last week of her life, when she was in pain and discomfort from a broken shoulder she attended two functions to remember my Dad.

My mother was a very private and humble person, she did not demand or expect anything for herself or for her family from anyone. She and my father had the highest moral and ethic values I have ever seen in any one. These are values that more people in this country and in other countries need to have, in order for these countries to move ahead.

She had very strong family values; it was she who made sure that we were very close to my father's family, especially as her family lived so far away in the US. She took care of all the finances, the general running of the house, etc, so my father never had to bother with such things. She drove her own car, did her own shopping at the grocery and market and never had a bodyguard until she became President. I remember in the late 1960's how she used to drive all over Guyana by herself late at night. Once coming back from a meeting in Berbice at night alone, she was so tired she nodded off for a moment at the wheel and ended up in a trench.

She stood by my father all his life and continued this when she insisted that the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre be establishment in March 2000. This Centre is now dedicated to both of them.

Since she died last year I have been going over her papers and diaries as a way of documenting her extraordinary life. Most people know that she was a politician, who worked alongside my father, a journalist who edited the Mirror and Thunder, and that she wrote children's stories. But she was so much more than these brilliant facets of her life.

She also had many artistic talents, and loved making things with her hands. She used to make small art sculptors using driftwood and shells she picked up on the beach at Bee Hive. She loved jewellery and once long ago she started making fun jewellery and that is how I got involved in making gold jewellery. I have also come across a few water colour painting she has done, together with sketches of old comrades. She has written many beautiful poems dedicated to her children, freedom fighters of Guyana and the world, and also to children in general. I will be launching a new publication on March 23 at The Cheddi Jagan Research Centre in Georgetown, dedicated to my mother, which includes some of these poems and drawings.

My parents were wonderful grandparents, and taught them important values which I hope they have all learnt. The grandchildren loved play-fighting with their grandfather, they had so much fun when my father took them swimming and played tennis with them and when my mother took them to the Zoo and read them stories. Some of my son's fondest memories of his grandfather were when he went alone with him to meetings on the Essiquibo coast and other places.

My children will remember the long conversations they had with my mother when she visited my home, sometimes for over 3 weeks at a time. They were able to interact with her, and really understand who she was. She gave them support in their studies and in their sports.

I invite you to find out all these and more things about my parents by visiting the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre in Georgetown or by visiting our website at [jagan.org](http://jagan.org). You can also purchase your own copies of their published works there.

It is my hope that through all these methods – the Centre, the web site, reading their books, etc. - more people around the world, will come to know about these great but humble people, who have made such an impact on so many lives.

My father said in 1995 and I quote: "I don't think I have reached the pinnacle of my life, for the Presidency is only a means to an end, to attain the end is to attain a sane and safe world, to bring an end to exploitation, suffering and misery, to construct a New Global Human Order. The struggle will continue."

My father has left a great mark on world history – his call for a New Global Human Order is gaining support every day around the globe. His views and ideas on the protection of the environment and the preservation of the forests have been carried on by this Government. I would like to take this opportunity to thank President Jagdeo for this and also to remind him that it is necessary to make sure that the world knows where these ideas originally came from. **I would like to thank President Jagdeo... and also to request that the Government gives due recognition to my father's role in the development of these initiatives.**

I would like to thank you all for coming out today, to pay homage and show your love and for remembering my dearest parents – also the Father and Mother of our Nation.