

Remembering The Past & Living The Present

by Janet Jagan

I was appointed Minister of Home Affairs in 1963 following the death of Minister Claude Christian. Like most things then and even the recent present, I was accused of a dastardly crime, that of killing him. The PNC used the occasion of Claude Christian's death from a heart attack to riot and make me the scapegoat (nothing new!) alleging that I pushed an umbrella wire into his heart. The funeral was another cause for rioting and terrorism with many being attacked and seriously injured at the burial ground.

Claude was a first class minister and a good comrade. I remember that we were at a meeting on the top floor of Freedom House when he took ill. He was a huge person, and it was very difficult to carry him downstairs to the ambulance. I visited him the next day at the private hospital (I forgot the name) in upper Croal Street. He was going against doctor's orders and had someone bring him in secretly a "chicken-in-the-rough," very popular at that time. I warned him against eating such food. He was later transferred to Public Hospital, Georgetown.

There a great tragedy oc-



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curred. His pregnant wife was taken to hospital at the same time, to deliver. Her delivery went OK. I cannot remember if he saw his child before he died. I hope he did, but he died while his wife and baby were in the hospital. And then the dreadful funeral!

I cannot help recalling how the PNC also ruined the funeral in 1997 of our dear and honoured National Poet, Martin Carter. Unruly and noisy groups of PNC rioters demonstrated outside the Sacred Heart Church in Main Street, Georgetown, making it impossible to hear the services for Martin Carter. But that's how it was in both 1963 and 1997.

The present is an exciting period as we prepare for the 2001 General Elections.

Boasting and showing off have never been features of the People's Progressive Party, but things

certainly look positive for the Party of the people. Our record of achievement is substantial. More than anything else, we have restored democracy and all the human rights that were violated before we came into office in 1992. We have restored sanity and confidence to Guyana and its people. We have restored hope, long lost before 1992. We have eliminated fear, which was so prevalent in that earlier period. People are finally getting back to normal.

In this festive season I have attended two functions honouring old folks, one at Ogle and one at Enterprise, East Coast, Demerara. Appreciation for the worth of senior citizens was warmly demonstrated by members of the respective communities. Our family structures, so important in community and nation, are re-enforced by these community get-togethers.

I had the pleasure of attending the Guyana Prize for Literature ceremony at the Cultural Centre and witnessing the exciting moment of distribution of prizes - the most important being the Guyana Prize for Literature to writer and scholar, David Dabydeen.