

# Sash Sawh - A Hero of Our Times

by Janet Jagan

I have known Sash Sawh most of his adult life - from his years in Canada to his last ten years in Guyana. I have always thought of him as a rock of stability and devotion to the ideals he held so close to his heart.

If there was ever a patriot, a man who truly loved his country that was Sash! I use the only name I know him by, not his birth name of Satyadeow, but the name we all used so fondly for this remarkable, unique man whose life was taken so cruelly Saturday night last.

Sash's life was no bed of roses. He grew up in low-income circumstances; his parents had a large family to feed and clothe. He lived under the difficult circumstances of the PNC regime, which eventually led to the misfortunes many encountered at that time, the loss of home and the eventual migration to survive.

It was not easy for Sash and his family in Canada, but the Sash we knew on his return home from Canada in 1996 was a resourceful survivor, not bitter but always cheerful, and who managed through great difficulties, to get a sound university education in Canada.

I noted that he was always cheerful; I would go further to say this word, joyous. There was something in his character that was 'joyous.' He always saw the pleasant side of life and was never a negative or complaining person. It was a pleasure to be in his presence! He did not burden one with complaints or criticisms of others. His positiveness is what made him a people's leader, and that is what he was in the Canadian days when he led the PPP support group - the Association of Concerned Guyanese (ACG). Along with his associates Geoffrey da Silva and Danny Doobay, the ACG became a strong support group in the Guyanese diaspora. Cheddi Jagan relied heavily on this group whose activities were fundamental in the struggle for the restoration of democracy.

It would be impossible to evaluate all the work done by Sash while he lived in Canada, but it was enormous. His self-sacrifice and devotion to duty were exceptional.

I can remember when Sash was named as the Guyana Ambassador to Venezuela. The PNC began a bitter and malicious campaign to discredit Sash, claiming that he gave false evidence in a minor court case. The pressure on President Cheddi Jagan to withdraw the appointment was intense, and, of course, the media jumped into the matter.

Cheddi Jagan stood firm and his faith in Sash Sawh was undiminished. The vilification of Sash was at its highest point, but both figures - Sash and Cheddi - carried on and with time, the vicious chorus of PNC and media slander failed. Sash proved to be a first-class ambassador, even earning a special award in Venezuela. He worked steadfastly among the Guyanese community in Venezuela, most being refugees from the Burnham regime.

I was with Dr Jagan on a visit to Venezuela in the 90s and we met with a large contingent of Guyanese. One could not fail to see the love and respect Sash enjoyed among them.

Dr Jagan brought Sash back to Guyana in 1996, only five months before his death (Dr Jagan), to become Minister of Fisheries and Crops. I think it was this appointment, which brought out the full potential of Sash's qualities. He became one of the leading members of the Cabinet and the most outgoing of the ministers. He was a man who got things done. We worked closely together when I was President in the years 1997-99 and I found him to be totally devoted to the important task of making agriculture a really strong and viable sector of the economy.

It is my estimation that he literally loved his work and gave his all to making different aspects of agriculture successful. He had a way with people - he connected - he understood their problems and aspirations. He was happy in his work and those with whom he worked were happy because of his interest which was so genuine.

Every year for many years, Sash headed the committee which commemorated Cheddi Jagan in the month of March. These were always successful occasions.

Sash was a family man - from a big family. His devotion, as a good son, to his ailing mother impressed me greatly. I suppose he could have done what many have done, put his mother in a good, safe nursing home in Canada when she became incapacitated, but not Sash! He brought his mother into his home in Guyana for many years, cared for her until her death last year. He was a good and caring son - part of his overall character as a good and caring person.

In this terrible tragedy, the assassination of a good man, a serving minister of government, we can be thankful that his children and wife survived. That's about all we can be thankful for, except that here, passing through life, was a man, a joyous, hardworking, caring, patriotic man - devoted to his country and his people. We can be thankful to have known such a man - a hero of our times!

Copyright © Nadira Jagan-Brancier 2009