

AfroPanamanian Newsletter



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No.4 Vol. IV

(May 2013)

Donation

Black Heritage "Month"



Story inside

Anecdotes

Controversy

Poetry

LOS AMIGOS :

Por la superación de la Etnia Negra
(Incorporated to SEAPAT EVENTOS, S.A.)

A group of friends, in Panama, decided to join forces to work on the rescue of values, customs and cultural traditions bequeathed to us through our ancestors. These have been displaced by others, thus losing a large part of our Black Heritage. We are evaluating all these forgotten traditions and values and highlighting figures as examples for future generations.

“For Black history to be done right, we must do it ourselves.” Edward Gaskin

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The editor is not responsible for the opinions
expressed by our collaborators

Cover Page: The stamp which appears on the cover was proposed to the Canal Zone Government by Mr. George W. Westerman (r.i.p.) accepted and issued in 1951 as a 10 cent postage stamp, used for years. Permission for its continuous use was given by his grandnephew, Cecil Reynolds.

Editorial

ADVICE FOR LIFE

I Believe...

***That heroes
are the people
who do what
has to be done
when it needs
to be done,
regardless of
the
consequences.***

-Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear.

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May 2013

About the portrait on the cover: While visiting Jamaica in 1988, Ines was attracted to this pencil drawing by j.macdonald Henry (c) and bought it in a handicraft store. This model must be a big man by now, but you will agree with me, he was a handsome boy.

Feedback (from our April issue)

Just setting the record straight.

----- Furaha Youngblood wrote:

In the comments section of the Colon article, I wrote the comments that begin "I'm of the opinion...." I wrote them in response to Damani's recollection of his father's memories of Colon in its heyday.	
It should have read: It breaks my heart to see Colon - where my Dad lived a hundred years ago and my Aunt lived until the 1960's and my long-lost cousins <i>MAY</i> still live - in such desperate shape. My Dad spoke glowingly of the Colon of his youth. Damani	I'm of the opinion that until black Panamanians unite and put pressure on the government through boycotts, street demonstrations, appeals to the united nations on the grounds of threats to children's health, and other forms of protest, they will continue to be trapped in poverty, crime and despair in the deathtrap of Colon. Colon is the worst example, but Curundu, Calidonia, Chorillo, are other pockets of poverty where Black people are predominant. Furaha Youngblood

My sincere congratulations, Inés, for keeping up the publication of the Afro Panamanian Newsletter. This recent edition contains a lot of valuable information about our past, present, and future as a people. I like the section with West Indian proverbs, some of which I know, but others I learn about for the first time. "Empty sack can't stand and full sack can't bend" is one of those that contains profound truth and wisdom. I was also happy to see the tributes to Judy Dixon and David Herbert DeLeon Martin. In this age of washing machines and dryers, our young people will learn what their forebearers had to do to obtain lily white clothing, thanks to the article by Dilsia Alleyne.

Good job,
Melva

The scrubbing board on which clothes were washed was called a jukkinboard. Ronald Williams

Thank you for all this valuable material. Regards, Julio Yao
--

Hi!(Dilsia), very proud and surprised, I did not know that this newsletter existed. I knew about the Afro -Etnia parade because its one of the biggest event in Colon, that excites all generations in my community. And, I'm also proud that at last the blacks in Panama are recognizing their heritage. Is there anyway, we can subscribe for the newsletter Or do they have it on the Internet? Thanks for sharing Jazz	<i>You will get it on a monthly basis. Under the logo on the front page of the newsletter you will see the website address.</i> Dilsia
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Dear Ms. Sealy,
Thanks ever so much! This is an outstanding newsletter, which brought back memories of wash days for me as I recalled watching my mother and grandmother wash clothes in Gainesville, Florida—my home town. Interestingly, for whites, they used bleach and the "blue stuff." However, they also boiled the white clothes in a big black pot over an outdoor fire. In addition, they used clothes lines to hang the clothes as opposed to placing them on the grass or rack to dry.
Please keep up the excellent effort.
Sincerely,
Doc Robinson

***Braid's Day – 3rd Monday in May
Black Heritage Day in Panama – May 30***

Starched and Ironed Clothes

By Dilsia Alleyne

Our grandmothers and mothers would cook the starch until it was very thick. A piece of candle (later Satina) was dropped in the hot starch. Then the starch was strained and diluted in cold water. After the last rinsing water, the clothes were passed through the starched water then they were wrung out and hung on the line to dry.

Our parents would starch shirts, skirts, some pants and even our fathers shorts (Dad's underwear).

Once the clothes were ready to be ironed, they were sprinkled with water, rolled up in round bundles and placed in a wash tub, then our mothers would stand and iron all morning or afternoon. If the iron stuck to the clothes, then a piece of candle was passed on its face or it was passed on a piece of wax paper to help it slide over the clothes they were ironing.



A Story of Perseverance

By Dilsia Alleyne

This afropanamanian woman was born in the forties, she was left handed, prior to been enrolled in the Panamanian public school system, her parents enrolled her in teacher and so kindergarten. You know those that grandma and ma would send you to so that you would learn to read and write, or just to keep you busy.

As a left handed person, she was cross trained to use her right hand. It seems that in this little girl's case it slowed her down, so when she graduated from sixth grade, her teachers told her parents that she was not material for a twelve-year school. Her teachers added, "she will not be able to do any heavy studying".

Her parents did not consider talking it over with her and give her the choice to go to another school. They just signed her up in a private sewing school.

Guest what! the girl in question's dream was to be a secretary. She graduated from sewing school. She got a job, and decided to go back to school. She wanted to show her family that she could study to be a secretary.

She enrolled in a night school; she would work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. then go to school and get home at 9 - 9:30 at night, to prepare her son for the next day, sit down and do her homework and then go to bed around one o'clock in the morning, to get up at 5 a.m.

When this woman completed an exam, quiz, homework and was graded with a 4.5 or 5, she would come home with her face illuminated and proud of her grades. But do you know something? with all that she had the support of her family she would wash her son's clothes, clean his shoes, and prepare his lunch box.

She successfully juggled work, care for her son and school, while she got excellent grades and finally graduated as a "*Perito Comercial*" Secretary.

She proved to herself and her family that she could have gone to a twelve-year school.

To this day she can use both her right and left hands.

"Never quit, always seek your dream"

“Miss” Walters (R.I.P.)
by Janina V. Walters

Coming into this world on November 30, 1936 Grace E. George de Walters was the first-born and only girl of the seven children born to Clarence Sylvester George and Jeanne E. McCray de George (both deceased). A 1953 graduate of the Pan American Institute, she also graduated from the Santo Tomás Hospital Nursing school. She then earned a nursing degree from the University of Panama and was certified as a nurse by the Board of the State of New York.



For some time Grace worked as a midwife in our local medical Institutions. After certification, she worked at the Gorgas Community Hospital where she served for 21 years until she was forced to retire due to illness. After a few months of convalescence, she returned as a part-time nurse in the Well Baby Clinic at Gorgas Hospital and then worked at Health Network of America - Panama (HNA-P) an insurance company for Federal retirees.

Our unforgettable Gracie was a very active member in the Society of Friends of the West Indian Museum (SAMAAP): She was the coordinator of the youth quadrille group and organized and founded their carnival queen pageant. Grace was the organizer and coordinator for over 60 young people during our participation in the II Youth World Festival held in Howard, Panama from July 21-28, 2001.

The wife of Professor Arnold S. Walters, founder and director of the Coro Polifónico de Panamá, and mother of: Cap. Edgardo Walters and Lic. Janina Walters, Grace was an active Episcopalian, and served as Senior Warden of Luke's Cathedral. Her elegant, feminine, cheerful, and fun-loving personality will always live in our memories. For that reason an endowed scholarship was established by SAMAAP in Grace's name.



By Cecil V. Reynolds

The first of Nine children born to Edna Westerman hailing from Sta. Lucia, and Bertley N. Springer, Barbadian. She was a graduate of the Liceo de Señoritas high school in Panama City, and the Panama Nursing School. Miss Springer was an accomplished nurse who was at the top of her class as a student and was the first anesthetist at the Hospital Santo Tomás.

As an employee of the Ministry of Public Health, it was her responsibility, together with a Social Worker and their driver (all Three, afro-descendants), to travel to the interior of the country, by jeep, to give medical check-ups to low-income inhabitants of underdeveloped areas, look after pregnant women and vaccinate their babies and children.

Ethel or “La Miss” as she was affectionately called by the students she prepared at the Sto. Tomas Nursing School to become obstetrical nurses, died in an elevator accident in 1962.



Ethel Carolyn Springer
(August 30, 1917 – Nov. 9, 1962)

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After ensuring that all her students had crossed over from a stalled elevator to the emergency elevator, as she attempted to cross over, she fell 7 floors to her death into the elevator shaft.

What is important to note is that on that day she was out in the field with those students and a group had gone for an evening shift, their first time and Ethel decided to go with them...she was not supposed to be with them but wanted to give them moral support as this was their first night shift....Her mother was upset since she had been out all day and had left home at 5:30 a.m. And, instead of resting, she wanted to give moral support to these students.

In her honor, the Nursing Faculty of the University of Panama grants the Ethel Carolyn Springer medal in special cases.

International Nurses day May 12th

Nurse Beatriz Graciela Luca

by Fernando A. Goldson

better known by most as "Gracie" or "Graciela", was born and raised in Chorrillo, Panama City, R.P. to Violeta and Percival Roberts, the oldest of her siblings: Carlos, Emilia, Dallys and Roberto.



By Cecil V. Reynolds

Gloria M. (Reynolds) Kodzwa, her niece, followed in Miss Ethel's footsteps, but surpassed her achievements by working in the Health Sector in developed and developing countries, private and public **on 3 continents** for over 40 years.

She is a graduate nurse, but has obtained several professional and academic awards for her contribution to the health sector globally. She holds a Masters degree in Public Health from the University of California - Berkeley, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner from the University of San Francisco - California, Diploma in Health Economics from the University of York in the UK and a Ph.D. in Health Care management with a focus on the Economics of Health.

Gloria has served the Government of Zimbabwe as Director of the University Teaching Hospital in Harare - Zimbabwe and later, as Deputy and Director/Acting Director of National Planning and Management in the Ministry of Health. During the same period, taught at the University of Zimbabwe Medical School, Department of Community Health. From 1991 to August 1993, undertook several short missions, taking her to various countries, for various bilateral and multilateral partners, including the World Bank and USAID.

Working with non state actors (often rebel groups) in order to achieve programming in the best interest of children was the major focus of her work in unstable situations (dealing with the Lord Resistance Army and rebel groups holding children as soldiers and girls as sexual slaves) Most of these unstable situations resulting in millions of displaced populations, She joined UNICEF Mozambique in September 1993 as the Health and Nutrition Programme Chief, and then moved to UNICEF South Africa in 1997 as Chief of the Health, Nutrition, Hygiene and Sanitation Programmes. From 2001 to 2007 she served as Deputy Country Representative for UNICEF in Mozambique and Uganda followed by her promotion to UNICEF country Representative to Burundi. In 2010, the United Nations Security Council commissioned her to document lessons learned on the United Nations intervention in Chad and Central Africa.

Gloria often commented that her life on the line was a small price to pay to ensure that the rights of all children in the world were protected and respected. She retired in 2010 after an illustrious career with the United Nations and resides in Zimbabwe.

Gloria was married to Engr. Paul M. Kodzwa of Zimbabwe, who died Sept 2012.



At an early age she attended "Mother Wright's Church", 25 St. Chorrillo.

Schooled by Ms. Ford from 5 to 7, then on to Escuela El Salvador #2, both in 26th St. Chorrillo. Then to Instituto Jose Dolores Moscote. During summer vacations she went back to Ms. Ford's to enhance her English.

Graciela migrated to the US in 1970 after graduating from Escuela de Belleza Maribel and having 2 sons (left with her mother), invited by her oldest brother, Carlos Andrea, who was serving in Vietnam.

Working as best she could, one evening she ran into Gloria, an acquaintance, who was attending Prospect Hgts. Hi School at night, she got the necessary information to inscribe, and through rain and snow she trudged to accumulate credits toward a High School diploma. While studying at B.A.T.C., she was placed in the GED course, receiving her certificate in 1974.

Determined to become a registered nurse, Graciela received her acceptance letter and enrolled in the Long Island University, Brooklyn campus in 1975. It was not easy, but she had lots of tutoring and perseverance. While attending LIU she worked nights at Nathan's in Coney Island and on a work-study program and LIU painting the building. That same year, she joined the US Army Reserve at a rank of E3 under the Civilian Acquired Skills Program (CASP) because of her secretarial skills.

While in the Army, Graciela received her BS degree in Nursing in January 1980. This degree permitted her the direct commission rank of 1st Lt. Working, studying, moonlighting with nursing agencies, in December 1989 she received an MS in Administration, specializing in Health Administration from Central Michigan University, Hamilton branch in Brooklyn. She had begun working in Correctional Health Svcs. In 1988, from which and the Army she retired in 2003. She brought her children to the US in 1981.

May 2013

My Mother

Author: Luis Greenidge Barker
In honor of Anome Silvia Barker

I

Lifted my eyes, and there it was, your picture on the wall,
From which I saw your beautiful eyes; looking at me
My heart grew with love, and I said to myself
God, my mother was so pretty

II

Thick eye brow and long eyelashes,
Adorned those eyes
Tick pretty lips, which is a special gift;
From God, to the black Africans

III

My memory went wild,
And decided to travel into the past
There were you, standing with you arms;
Wide open, protecting us all

IV

All I could think about was love;
Who could not easily love you?
"Love, someone who gave so much"
"Love, someone who ask for so little"

V

Give me one of your children,
That will never happened, was the answer;
"I will not abandon any of them"
Hard day and stormy weather, did not break you

VI

How much love I feel for my mother
"Because she sacrificed herself"
"Because she put us in front of her"
"Because she did not surrender"

VII

It was a sunny March afternoon,
When the Angel came, and guided you;
To that special place, that our great
Creator; reserved for new Angels

VIII

Good memories and love, goes on forever;
Because you only die if you are forgotten,
Could I be more fortunate, I have said; a million times...
My mother, was my mother.

--Second Sunday in May – Mother's Day

Excerpts from Yvette Modestin's Reflections, Grounded in Blackness in *Proyecto Afrolatin@*
Honoring my Mother

In continuing to share my internal dialogue out loud, I share my Reflection, Grounded in Blackness. In writing on this week, I celebrate my mother on her birthday and honor her on the anniversary of her passing. Thanks Mama for grounding me in my Blackness.

I write this with a Malcolm X phrase in mind. Malcolm X stated many times, "Being Pro Black does not mean I am anti-white, it just means I am Pro Black."

I ask myself and you, what does that mean for people of African descent today?

What does it mean to the community we live in? What does it mean to you?

First, Being Pro Black means loving self and loving my Black brother and sister unconditionally.

Being Grounded in Blackness means;



Modestin and her mother

(picture sent by Yvette)

-Feeling the pain of all who face the inequality and racism that exists in our society.

-Feeling responsible for the city that shaped me. Acknowledging the obstacles it faces and looking at those who say, "I cannot go there" that I can because that is who I am and what I come from.

-Loving a Black man and all he brings to the table.

-Hugging my nine year old nephew and letting him know that he is bright and can think outside the box.

-Telling my niece everyday that she is FABULOUS.

-Feeling the hurt of any Black woman who is rejected by any Black man for the stereotypes that have been placed on us, such as, too aggressive, confrontational and not those that speak to our depth as, survivors, loyal and loving.

-Acknowledging the deeply rooted Institutional racism that exists in the Americas and naming those who benefit from the **division in our communities**.

-Standing strong while you sit with your discomfort as we continue to face the inconsistencies in health care, education and economics.

-Feeling responsible for not being home to push back at those who think Colon is what it is only because of the people. Colon is not in the state that it is only because what many say, the people are lazy, the crime, which I acknowledge is really bad, but also because the government has forgotten about the people specifically those who make up the majority of the community.

-Loving the texture of my hair, the curve in my hips and the rhythm of my soul.

Grounded in Blackness is not being taken off the path that people of African descent will be loved, held, acknowledged for the work and the depth that we awake to everyday.

-Not losing focus to the discomfort of others who refuse to hear our reality.

-Believing in my power to change and give to my community.

I give thanks to my mother for leaving a legacy of being proud and not allowing anyone to shake that, for showing me the connection between every Black Panamanian, leading me on a deeper search of that unity. Thanks, for the gift of seeing myself in Nicaragua, Belize, Ecuador and the women of Nigeria.

Thanks Mama for supporting my need to break down the barriers that I saw as a child, for reminding me to take my shoes off to be one with my teammates on the track team and for sitting us down as a family to watch Sounder.

I will continue to build a list and walk with the spirit that keeps me Grounded in my Blackness.

Peace and love,
Yvette