

ON THE STREET WHERE I LIVED

by Peter Halder,

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I was born, grew up and lived for many years on a virtually unknown street.

It's name is Non Pareil Street and it's in Albouystown, Georgetown, Guyana.

My family consisted of my father and mother, Earshad and Mary Halder, three brothers - Bonnie, Felix and Vernon, all of whom have passed away, and two sisters - Leila and Bernice.

My niece, Olivia (Livy) Kissoon later came to live with us. She now lives in Toronto, Canada. Her Mom Leila had migrated to Trinidad, then England and now lives in Cyprus. Bernice now lives in Orlando, Florida.

Albouystown is the long, narrow southern suburb of Georgetown, often called a "slum area" due to its "long ranges" of one room homes, thickly populated "yards", latrines for the use of landlord and tenants and to a minor extent, crime.

It is bounded on the north by Sussex Street and the Sussex Street trench, on the east by Callendar Street, on the south by Punt Trench Dam and the Punt Trench and on the west by La Penitence Public Road and Market. It's north to south width is only two blocks and straddling the middle from east to west is James Street.

Callendar Street, proceeding west, is followed by Garnett Street, Campbell Street, Curtis Street, Non Pareil Street, Cooper Street, Victoria Street, King Edward Street, Albert Street, Bel Air Street, La Penitence Street, Barr Street, Albouys Street, Hill Street, Hogg Street and La Penitence Public Road.

During the late 1930's and the 1940s, Albouystown was sparsely populated and Non Pareil Street, moreso. The "yards" were large so there were not many between Sussex Street and Punt Trench Dam.

My father came from India but my mother was born in Essequibo.

In our "yard" were four tenants living in rooms below and four tenants living in single rooms in a "long range" at the back. One tenant Miss Audrey worked with mason George building graves in the La Repentir cemetery. On one occasion, when a concrete grave was being reused, she couldn't get the bones out and she asked me to help her. I did.

Another tenant, Miss Olga got married to a Mr. Felix. The reception was kept at the RAF Hall at James and Hunter Streets. I recall there was a death in her family and a "wake" was held in our yard. I read the words out loud as many joined in singing hymns popularly known as "sankies." During the wake, there was a big commotion. A man started talking in a strange language, and then threw himself on the ground, stood on his head and danced around on his head. My mother got a bucket of water and threw it on him. He spluttered and fell on his back. He got up in a few minutes and couldn't remember a thing. My mother said that our noise probably disturbed an evil spirit from the nearby Le Repentir cemetery which came and took possession of him and that was why she had put some white lavender in the water.

There was one latrine which served my family and all the tenants. "Poe" and "slop can" were the vessels of choice at night. The latrine was also used for baths using a bucket of water and a calabash. "Salt soap" was the going thing and a dried nenwa was the wash sponge.

There was a large common sink, standpipe, in the "yard" that served landlord and tenants, as well as the neighbours next door. It was used for drawing "pipe" water, washing wares, bathing small children and

washing clothes... with beater, scrubbing board, Rickett's Crown Blue and salt soap. My mother later had a wooden wash tub upstairs. She boiled starch for use when washing shirts. We had a coal pot and three "cold" irons. When our clothes were ironed on Sunday afternoons, coal was put in the iron coal pot and lit. The irons were placed on red hot coals. The dinner table was used at the ironing board. A blanket was placed over it, covered by a cotton cloth. The red hot iron was taken from the coal pot, using a thick fold of cloth to hold the handle. A piece of beef suet (fat) was necessary to grease the iron before use. The grease was then rubbed off. The use of grease made the ironing process smooth. There was a large enamel cup of water nearby. It was used to sprinkle water with your fingers on the clothes as you ironed them. When the iron got cold, it was replaced in the coal pot and another taken out.

All of us, boys and girl, were taught to and did: scrubbing the front and back steps, floor in the house and wooden tables weekly; keeping our rooms and the house neat and tidy; cleaning and varnishing the furniture at Christmas time; washing the wares; washing clothes; ironing; buying groceries and cooking.

The "paling" separated a few "yards" in Non Pareil Street.

Apart from the large common sink, there was no other source of piped water. There was a huge wooden vat which collected rain water and the tenants and ourselves used its water for drinking only.

When the dry season was on and the vat water was low, I had to walk to Sussex and Bel Air Streets where there was a huge iron tank which stored water, fill my galvanized bucket, cover it with a flour bag sheet, have it put on my head and take it home for drinking.

We had a sink upstairs but no piped water. We fetched water from the standpipe downstairs to 'wash wares' and cook. We used salt soap with a coconut fibre to wash wares. The soap was kept in a large, flat sardine can.

In the first yard was Mrs. Branch and her family. An always laden gooseberry tree was on the boundary between our two yards. The Branches were replaced by a tinsmith, Mr. Henry and his family, and then the Abduls. Brother Abdul and his family were members of the Assemblies of God Church. He worked at the CDC Sawmill at Houston on the East Bank.

In the third yard was a family from Plaisance. Their run-down cottage was later torn down and a new two-bedroom cottage replaced it. Among its first tenants was a family from Still In Hope, Pomeroy, Mrs. Elizabeth Brock (nee Van Sluytman) and her children Myrtle, Barry, Ingrid, Viveca and Ian. Myrtle was the most beautiful girl on Non Pareil Street and Viveca the only blonde. Their father, Benjie Brock was a boatbuilder. Myrtle now lives in New Zealand, Barry in England, Ian in Venezuela, Ingrid in Austria and Viveca in New York. Non Pareil Street has reached out to the four corners of the world. Also living in the same cottage was a Mrs Narine with her daughter, Aurelia Manson-Hing also called MUY, and also her two sons, Eddie and John "Barrel" Narine.

In the fourth lived Prison Warder Padmore and his family. His son Bunty later became Director of Prisons. He formed a Cricket Club named Widen. Brother Neville migrated to the United States and became a Doctor of Medicine. His daughter Cynthia migrated to Canada. There were three other sisters. The Padmores had a large backyard and the neighbourhood kids played cricket there regularly using a balata ball and a bat made of greenheart wood. On our street we called it bat and ball.

In the two bottom flat rooms lived a fisherman and the Plaisance family who moved there from the demolished house. The family consisted of the mother Miss Ivy, her eldest son Bobbie, and Ivelaw and Sukie. The folks organised a Masquerade Band every Christmas Season. I would go most nights to hear

them tune up their kettle and bass drums, watch as they finished their multi-coloured costumes and repair their stilts. I would accompany them when they went masquerading.

I was so impressed with their financial rewards that I organised a youth group of my own, using old sardine cans, palm tree butter cans, bottles and iron pieces and created our own music and dancing. We easily made \$1 a night, not to mention slices of cake and soft drink... American Cream Soda, Two-Glass Quencha, Portello and Vimto.

We used to call the old fisherman Mr. Francis. He had a castnet which he mended from time to time. He used the net to catch fish in the Sussex Street and Burial Ground trenches. His niece Yvonne also lived there and did the home chores. She now resides in New York.

The "Kali Mai Poojah" procession was an annual feature for the area. When it was in our street, my mother would call us all into the house and lock the doors and windows. The procession was led by a young man dressed in a dhoti and turban and wielding a sharp cutlass.

At the corner of James Street, was Ragnauth Grocery and Cake Shop and over the road was 'Braina' Grocery and Parlour, the latter run by her daughter Lucille. At the front of the huge yard was a unit with two one- roomed apartments. Next to it, near the concrete alley lived mason George who as I said before, built concrete tombs in the cemetery.

There was a "long range" at the back. I recall the Alexander family, originally from Berbice, living in that range. Sons Paul, Melvin were my good friends and we all attended St. Stephen's and Enterprise High School. The boys also had a beautiful sister named Erma.

Some nights, Lucille's husband who was in the parlour, and who was an avid cricketer, would arrange for racing competitions around the block and the winner got a "nutcake" or a "nuttin."

In those days, nearly all sweets were made locally, except for toffee- Batgers- which was imported from England. Local sweets included sour stick, lollipop, peppermint on a stick, sweetie balls of all colours and the long, flat, brown butterscotch made by Mr. Parker in his shop on Camp Street, near D'Urban Street.

The Ragnauth family owned a huge yard which had three "long ranges." Two ran from east to west and the third from north to south. In an end room of the north to south one lived Channa Man and his family. He was so called because he sold channa and pholouri outside Empire Cinema for all three movie shows and at the morning show on Public Holidays. He rode a bicycle to the cinema with a carrier attached to the handle. A large basket was in the carrier and it contained his food items, a large bottle of "souree", paper and paper bags. In the other end room lived the Mohammed family. The sons Yussuf and Hassan were schoolmates of mine. Their very young brother was called "Chooks."

Next to the Ragnauth grocery and cakeshop, run by son Jimmy, was a small cottage and its tenant owned and operated a donkey cart. He cut grass every afternoon in the Burial Ground for his donkey.

Also in the "yard", in the southernmost range, was an Orthodox Coptic Church.

Miss Richards lived in a cottage next to it. She was always well dressed and rode a Raleigh's ladies' bicycle.

Towards the end, near the Punt Trench was a cow pen. I was sent there to buy fresh milk from the owner from time to time. I was served by young man whom we called "Pea". In the same yard, we played bat and ball with Pea's brother Baba.

Next to that yard lived the Nantons in a beige-coloured cottage. I was a good friend of the son, Wilfred. Many years later, Nanton and Braina's granddaughter came to see me at the District Administration Office, Christianburg, opposite McKenzie, to discuss their marriage plans. In a cottage at the back of the yard lived the Brooks family. My mother visited Mrs. Brooks from time to time.

On the other side of the road, next to Punt Trench Dam, was a cottage in which lived the Naraine family. We called Mr. Naraine, Bunai. The land in front of the house was paved with cow dung and mud which gave it a nice look. In front of the yard were a few tall bamboo poles with red triangular flags (jandhi) at the top.

Next to it was a huge yard with the usual "long range" and a house. In the house lived the Mollyneaux family.

On the western side, the first yard next to the Sussex Street trench, was another tenement compound but with a two-storeyed house in front and a cottage at the back. The Delphs lived in the back cottage for many years.

Mr. Alfred Delph was a policeman and his daughter, Barbara, was in the first group of Women Police recruited, PW50. Other family members were Roslyn, Camille, Paula, Sandra, John, Bernard, Raymond and Clairmont.

Mr. Delph's brother, Donald, also a policeman, lived on Sussex Street near La Penitence Market. A cousin lived on Hunter Street. The Delphs now live in the United States but Roslyn and Paula live in the United Kingdom.

In the bottom flat of the two-storeyed house lived the Persaud family. Bobby, Derek and I used to play marbles. The 'taw' was set on one side of the street and we played to it from the other side. We played for buttons. A "butt", hitting the opponent's marble, and you collected 2 buttons, 'butt' and span was 3 buttons and a span, 1 button. Mr. Persaud sold genips at the markets. He usually paid a landlord for the entire tree and for picking the fruit from it. I would join his sons in climbing the tree and placing bunches of fruit in a bucket which was sent to the ground using a rope. That family was replaced by one from the North West District. I recall the beautiful sisters Yvette, Claudette, Bonita and son Terry. They later migrated to Canada. Their mother got married to a Mr. Khan who worked at Rahaman Soft Drink Factory on the East Bank Road. The family eventually moved next door to the Corrica house and the Corrica family moved to Leopold Street.

In the upstairs flat lived Mr. and Mrs. Barry Hall. Mr Hall worked at the Transport and Harbours Department. Another Da Silva family, from the Pomeroun, lived on Non Pareil Street in later years. One of the daughters, the beautiful Helena, was very friendly and consequently, well-known along the street. She attended St. Stephen's School. She now lives in Australia.

In the western end room in the "long range" abutting the Sussex Street trench, lived Mr. Bacchus and his wife. They had a "cook" (food) shop in Big (Stabroek) Market. Mr. Bacchus always told us to beware of spirits from the Burial Ground. He said he saw them at night. At the eastern end room lived a stevedore we called Mr. Jackie. When he got drunk some Sundays, he would shout "I personally am the greatest." In the middle room lived a Mr. Persaud and his wife Dulahin. They had three children, Winston, "Boyie" and "Girlie." Winston became a policeman and now lives in New York.

The second yard was owned by a Mr. Corrica who worked at the Train Station on Lamaha Street. His children Roy, Gloria, Pinky and I were good friends. There was weightlifting in his yard every afternoon which attracted many men of all races. In his yard was a "Buxton Spice" mango tree, dunks tree, genip tree, guava tree and calabash tree. When the mangoes were near to ripen, I would climb the tree and pick

as many as I could. Mr. Corrica shared them with the neighbours. Roy and I played bat and ball in the front of the yard from time to time.

I used to climb and perch in the calabash tree to "gaff" with Barbara Delph. The Delphs organised a picnic to the Lamaha Canal once a year. At the end of Sussex Street was the "backdam" along which was a very narrow path which led to the Lamaha Canal, about a mile and a half away. To save the long walk, John and Raymond Delph and myself managed to get some plantain suckers, staple them firmly together using stout, narrow wooden stakes and make a raft. We poled up the Sussex Street trench to the Canal. We were able to put the heavy items, like pots, on the raft. On another occasion we used a narrow, wooden boat, which capsized after a short distance. On occasions, I used to go with the Delphs grandma Lillian Taitt, up the backdam to pick jamoon and green mangoes. She made drink and wine from the jamoon fruit and achar was made from the mango. I liked, however, mango "chow chow." The "turning" mango flesh was cut into pieces and sprinkled with salt and pepper sauce. It was a dish fit for a King.

The third yard had three "long ranges" and a cottage. A Portuguese family Rodrigues, lived in one of the rooms in the first "range". Mr. Rodrigues was always well dressed, tie and all. Another Portuguese family, D'Oliveira, lived in the bottom flat of the cottage. They were related to the Delphs. I recall three sisters - Waveney, Joan and Pam. Next to them, in a small cottage lived Mr. Corrica's mother. We called her "Nurse" since she wore a nurse's uniform to work. Africans and Indians lived in the other rooms. The fourth yard, next to James Street had one "long range". Miss Ismay made mokra baskets and lived in the end room. She had two sons, Neville and Buster who were good friends of mine. Next to her lived a fair-skinned lady who had a gentleman who was a sailor. When he returned from a trip, he used to bring chocolates. I would get one now and then and I ate it with relish. Arjune, the son of the landlady, Miss Alice, lived in the last room.

The Sussex Street trench in those days was a real trench, often dredged by the British Government. I used to fish in it for kassee, cuirass, hassar and catch prawns in a rice bag seine. My mother got an iron barrel hoop, sewed it along the top of the bag, put flour and rice, mixed with molasses along the sides and bottom and put leaves in it. We put a few rocks in it to make it sink and stay under water. We let it down with a stout cord to the bottom of the trench. When we pulled it up after an hour or so, we took out a quantity of "catchman" prawns that went into it, ate the mixture and remained in it. We set it back again. Since we had no "fridge", the prawns were "peeled", washed and limed that same night and then slightly fried with salt to keep them from spoiling. They made a delicious curry for dinner the next day.

I also swam in the trench. The bridge over it was a "big bridge", one that permitted cars to drive across. The bridges across the trench, eastwards, were all made of two long planks with side rails, except for Callendar Street, where it was a long, round log, which required skill and agility to walk across on.

On Curtis Street, the first yard belonged to Miss Corbin. She lived alone in the huge compound with many fruit trees... plum, almond, somatoo (passion fruit), genip, guava, jamoon, coconut and locust ("stinking toe").

Ripe fruit from the plum and locust tree often fell into the Sussex Street trench. So I got an empty Ovaltine tin, used a nail to bore holes on its bottom and put holes on each side near the top to push a long, straight and narrow rod through. I would stand on the Big Bridge and use my can and rod to collect floating fruit.

My own yard had a star-apple tree in front and a guava tree and coconut tree at the back. The star-apple tree was the source on many bites by white and brown, sometimes, green "hairy worms". The coconut tree provided the staple for my mother making "chip sugarcake" and "grated sugarcake". She made jam with the guavas. My father built a fowl pen in the back yard. I had to go most mornings to the parapet along

Sussex Street and cut grass with a grassknife to throw in the pen. We also planted eddoe and cassava in the backyard.

Across Sussex Street was the Le Repentir trench and Burial Ground (Cemetery). I walked through the Burial Ground every school day, to and from school.

At the corner of James and Curtis Street was "putagee" Louis parlour and grocery. I used to enjoy his "sardine (Marshall's Tomato Sauce) and bread (penny loaf)" and washed it down with a mauby or pine drink. He also sold the best "Custard Blocks" with raisin in them. I recall his two sons Herman and Buds.

Opposite was Lil Boy's "yard" and parlour/grocery.

At the northern end of Curtis Street was a Horse Stable and a Club House. Dances were held in the Club House from time to time. After that was another "long range". The Indian men who lived in the range played a card game called "trup chal" almost every Sunday morning. The game is similar to "Whist" and was popular in the colony at that time. After that "yard" was a Soap Factory. We bought unused pieces from it at a very cheap price. Across the road was a tall house and behind it a small cow pen.

The Savory family lived in the first "yard" at Campbell and Sussex Streets. I didn't visit that Street often until the Henrys opened a Baker Shop towards the end of it, near the punt trench

At Garnett and James Street was Beharry's shop. The building was the only one in the area to have a tower. His son Kunj and I attended Enterprise High School together. Kunj went to school each day with only one exercise book in his back pocket but he was an expert on opera. He invited me some Sundays to listen to his LPs of Beniaminio Gilli, Enrico Caruso and Richard Tauber. At the Sussex Street corner, we bought parcels of sheep meat, mutton, from time to time, from an Indian family who lived in a cottage

Calypsoes popular at that time were Hitler Bring Back The Salfish , The More They Try To Do Me Bad Is The Better I live In Trinidad, Christmas In England and Ah Bernice.

The popular cigarette brands were Clipper and Four Aces.

The popular wines were Key and Gunboat. For rum it was 'Cut and Drop' sold in a small black lemonade bottle, called a "cuttie" or "cut down". I used to be fascinated with the manner in which the men opened it. They shook it up and then slapped the bottom of the bottle with the palm of their hand and the cork eased out.

The beer of choice was Frontenac.

On the north-eastern side of James and Cooper, was a grocery and parlour owned by Mr. Persaud. My mother bought her groceries there once a week on Fridays. I accompanied her so I could take the basket of groceries home on my head. The family lived above the business. There were two "long ranges" in the large yard. Mr. Persaud had two sons, Conrad and Victor and two daughters. After Mr. Persaud died, the family opened a grocery and cake shop on Sussex Street, near to La Penitence Market and moved there. They later bought the property on the western side of Non Pareil and Sussex Streets and renovated it.

On the southeastern side lived the Ferguson family who owned and operated a parlour and radio repair shop.

Under a tall house, near the southwest corner of James and Cooper Streets, a shoemaker plied his trade.

In a cottage further down Cooper Street lived the Shuffler family who I was told was from Barbados.

A lonely woman, with a bottle lamp and a small wooden tray on a bench, sold black pudding from a blue enamel pot on the bridge of a cottage on James Street opposite Buntan's Church on Saturday and Sunday nights. One slice, cut in two with "souree" between and lathered with some kind of oil applied with a feather, was sold for a penny. My mother was against eating blood but I enjoyed that black pudding. The Singh family lived in the cottage. Jeanette Singh attended Carmel R.C. School. She later became a teacher. Her brother was Pritipal Singh.

At James and Victoria lived the Meerabux family. Vincent later became a lawyer and magistrate. In the next yard lived the Eric Small family. On the other side was a cake shop and grocery owned by a son of the Ragnauth family. And on the south-western corner was a cottage in which lived a fair-skinned Indian man who had several birds in cages, one of them was a yellow canary. On the south-eastern side lived the Pariag family.

In a beautiful cottage on the southern side of James Street, between Victoria and King Edward Street, lived the Persaud family. Mr. Persaud worked with Bookers and was one of the very few people in Albouystown to own a private motor car at that time. There were two daughters, "Palmy" and Lucille.

At the corner of James and King Edward Streets was a cottage in which lived "Black" Marie. She sold firewood. On the eastern side of her house was a vacant lot and once a year, cumfa dancing was held there. I was always fascinated by the beat of the drums, the dancing girls and the foreign language they spoke when they fell to the ground, foaming from the mouth.

At James and Bel Air Streets was Egbert Grocery and Parlour. Egbert sold a tasty mauby but used to "ram" the glass with ice. Next to Egbert's on Bel Air Street, was a Woodworking Shop under a house. It was where I had my first wooden gun made, trigger and all. I next cut rubber bands from an old bicycle tube. The bands were stretched around the front of the gun and the trigger for tension. I picked buckbeads from weeds in the cemetery to use as "ammunition" for my "gun". On the southern side of James and Bel Air Streets, was a grocery and parlour, owned by an Indian family.

At the corner of Albert and James Streets, opposite Dictator Rum Shop, was a grocery and above it lived Lionel Lee who operated a taxi service using Morris 8 cars.

Between Bel Air and Albert Streets was a "green" where we played cricket and football from time to time. It was also used as a site where women worked breaking large blocks of white stone (marl), imported from Barbados I was told. The broken stones were used to build up James Street and other streets in Albouystown.

At the northern end of Callendar Street was the Ball Field. It was the popular place for cricket on Saturdays and Sundays, using a steel drum cover as the wicket, coconut branch bats and tennis(winpuss), sponge or balata balls.

At Easter, a fair was held there and one of the features was trying to walk across "The Greasy Pole", the round timber log across the Sussex Street Trench, laced with grease. The first across got a spanking new green Five Dollar Bill. It was also an ideal area for flying kites.

A good friend from St.Stephen's School, Bridgelall lived on the eastern side of Calendar Street. He became a member of the Georgetown Fire Brigade.

The late Fred Wills was a product of Albouystown . Hammy Green's father had a Drug Store at Barr and James Street. I used to go there to buy for my mother, Polson's Green Cough Syrup, Robert's Cough Syrup or Haliborange- halibut oil and orange juice. There was a man whom the people said was "mad" that drew spaceships on the concrete near the Drug Store. Walter 'Afoo' Chin also lived on James Street. And then there was Frank Alexander Chandra whose father, I believe, had a Radio Shop on Punt Trench Road. Frank, I was told, got Ten Distinction Firsts in the ten subjects he took for Senior Cambridge at Enterprise High School. It was never equalled though I was told that Fred Wills got nine Distinctions.

At five, my mother took me to Mr. Ross's private school at James and King Edward Street. The school was sponsored by the Ramsaroop Poor House - Dharam Shala - at Sussex Street corner.

Next to the school was a Hindu temple. The British Governor of the colony visited the Poor House establishment once a year, during the Christmas Season and a function was held in the Temple. Patriotic songs were sung. One Governor described the roti he ate as "broadened bread" and the dhal as highly seasoned split peas soup.

I didn't like Mr. Ross' school so the next year, my mother enrolled me in Lil ABC at St. Stephen Church of Scotland School at St. Stephen, Adelaide and Princess Streets. I recall, however, in later years, I went to Mr. Ross' home on Cooper Street, near James Street, for extra school lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic.

Those were the days of slate and pencil which were bought from Ramdeholl Shop on Cooper Street near the Punt Trench or Texeira's Hardware Store on Louisa Row near Hadfield Street. My favourite was "chalkie slate" and "chalkie pencil." I recall a young, beautiful Miss Margaret Ramdeholl who had long black hair. The Prescott family also lived on Cooper Street. The boys also attended St. Stephen School. Teacher Bessie used a nail and a ruler to etch lines on the slate for ease of writing. Later came exercise books, some specially double- lined to practice cursive writing, drawing books, West Indian Reader and Royal Reader.

When I first learned to write, the letters were so crooked that the boy sitting next to me in Lil ABC would say that it looked like "crabfoot" and sang "crabfoot marching in the burial ground, tek a big stick and knock um down."

Two items about Lil ABC still remain in my memory. One is the large ABC picture-filled placard, that was tacked to a wall... A for Apple, B for Bat, C for Cat,etc.,etc. My favourite letter was Z (pronounced Zed) for Zebu Bull. The other was a large placard of "Do's and Don'ts." We had to learn them by heart each day.

Until I was seven, I walked about barefoot. At that age, my teacher insisted I wear "yachting" shoes. The teacher of Lil ABC was Teacher Bessie, Big ABC was Miss Fletcher, I can't recall who taught First Standard, but Second Standard was Miss Leitch, Third was Miss Fox and Mr. Durant, fourth was Mr. Conrad Luke, Fifth was Mrs. Cooke and Sixth, Mr. Cooke. The Headmaster was Charles B. Giddings. From Third Standard, I was elevated to Scholarship Class run by Mr. Giddings. I recall the class included G.A.S. Sampson, now a Geologist in Canada, Carl Agard, Clarence Wilkinson, McKenzie, Chung, Eustace Forde, Edwin Jack, Kean MacClean and Gloria Newport.

A famous scholar of St. Stephens was the late Dr Walter Rodney.

We began classes at St. Stephen's each day by saying The Lord's Prayer and ever so often, we all attended a service in the Church adjacent to the school.

Being poor was not a crime nor was walking barefoot. I recall for lunch, I would buy a ticket from school for 10cents for five daily lunches at the Children's Breakfast Centre at Smyth and Princess Streets, next to St. Phillip's School.

At home, we ate from enamel plates, drank from enamel cups and ate with our fingers. Sometimes we were given spoons. There was no stove. My mother mixed cow and donkey dung with mud from the Punt Trench and made a "fireside", chula, with two holes. It used wood so most afternoons we searched the nearby Burial Ground for dry branches. A large 5lb empty tin of Palm Tree Salt Butter was converted into a pot to boil water. The only other cooking utensils were a frying pan, a large iron skillet, a carrahee, a tawa for making roti, and a large blue enamel pot for cooking pepperpot. My mother also, from time to time, bought catfish from the market, cut, cleaned and salted them and smoked them over the chula. The smoked catfish lasted many weeks and tasted good in metagee. We didn't have toothbrushes and toothpaste in our early years. We used blacksage sticks.

My father cut my hair once a month. He sharpened his German razor on a special stone and then on a leather belt. He put a shallow calabash around my head and cut my hair with a pair of scissors, which he sharpened on stone, around the calabash. The style was called "round-the-world." When that was over, he used the razor to remove the very short hairs around the side, back, neck and face. There were many nicks but cotton wool with surgical spirit was always ready to be applied, sometimes iodine. At Easter, the boys on Non Pareil Street used exercise book leaves and dried coconut leaves spines to make kites. Our parents' sewing thread was borrowed for the loop and the line and pieces of an old dress for the tail. The popular name for the kite was "caddy old punt" or conkawa.

Needless to say, my brothers and sister had our monthly dose of either castor oil or senna pods or senna leaf or epsom salts or cascara to "clean us out." And we had daily, when our parents could afford it, Seven Seas Cod Liver Oil and sometimes Wander Brand "Malt" or Ovaltine. As babies, we were brought up on Cow and Gate Milk Powder or Lactogen. If we fell and got our hand or feet scraped, my mother would go in the yard, collect the leaves of an ant-bush, grind it, apply it to the wound and cover it with a cloth bandage. It was healed in 48 hours. For an abscess she would get a piece of conchineal, grate it, apply it around and bandage it. It would burst within 24 hours. For swellings, she would get a duckweed (water lily) leaf from the burial ground trench, heat it and continuously apply it to the area. The swelling usually disappeared in 24 hours. Soldier pursley and sweet broom from the yard was also used to make tea.

At the end of Callendar Street, adjacent to the Punt Trench, was a High Bridge, another one being at Bel Air Street, which had only one plank and no handrail and, which connected Albouystown to La Penitence. At the side of the High Bridge was a popular swimming spot known as "The Parloff". Opposite was a parlour which sold the best Coconut Biscuit (record) in the area. And further east, about 50 yards was the most popular swimming spot, "Clay". A piece of flesh on my right index finger was bitten off by a pirai, "pirahna" while swimming there one afternoon. There was another bridge at Hunter Street.

Some mornings, at about four o'clock, Carl Agard, Reggie Wilkinson and I used to go swimming in the Atlantic Ocean at the seawall. We made arrangements for the two to tie a string to their big toe and throw it through the bedroom window. It must be long enough to reach near the ground. Since I was the furthest away, I would run to Reggie's home on Hunter Street first and pull the string. He would join me in a jiffy. Next was Carl on Henry Street. We trotted to the seawall, did our swimming and trotted back home in time for breakfast and school.

Once a year, a picnic or excursion, with music and dancing was held in two or three punts drawn along the Punt Trench by two horses.

My mother baked bread once weekly on Saturdays. I would place each tin tray of the plaited bread dough, securely covered with a flour bag sheet, on my head and take it to the Bakery at the corner of Cooper Street (Hell's Kitchen) and James Street for baking.

Later, when the Henrys opened a Baker Shop on Campbell Street, I would walk there to buy bread or walk to Dictator's Bakery on James Street, between Hunter and Barr Streets. Collar, salara, butterflap, pennyloaf, cottage loaf, panbread and doughboy, were in fashion at that time. For cakes, there was "white-eye", buns, aniseed biscuit, pine tart, coconut rolls and coconut biscuit.

Dictator Bakery was owned by the Perreira family who lived above it. Their son Jack and I became good friends.

In the second house on Albert Street, near to Sussex Street, lived the Burnhams. Charwin and Igris were High School chums of mine. Their famous Steelband, the Texacans, had its origin there. It attracted a large crowd during practice sessions.

At James and Hunter Street was the RAF Dance Hall. Under it was a cake shop and on the other side of the road another cake shop, later a liquor store, Joe Louis, where you could buy items 24 hours daily. At the south western corner was another cake shop.

At Sussex and Cooper Streets, next to the trench, was a cottage in which lived a fair-skinned lady and her son who later became a Calypso King of British Guiana, Lord Coffee. In the same yard was a two - storeyed house. The top flat had multi-coloured windows. In it lived a Frenchman who made tourist souvenirs. I used to catch and sell him butterflies for a penny each. He prepared and used the butterflies to decorate wooden trays with a glass covered bottom. In the bottom flat lived the Gonsalves. I recall Veronica, who was a good friend of Myrtle Brock, and her sister Olympia. In the cottage to the south lived the Ishmaels. Annie was a good friend of the Delphs.

At Sussex and Victoria Streets lived the Austin family in a small cottage. Mrs. Austin was a Jehovah's Witness and my mother visited her regularly. She always took me with her and it was a delight for the kind lady always served biscuits (crackers) with homemade guava jelly and an enamel cup of "swank." Next to her yard was a two-storeyed house and in the top flat lived a goldsmith, a Mr. Kissoon. He once showed me how he melted gold and built moulds for making jewellery. Further up the street lived the Brown family. Brothers Michael and Hubert were schoolmates of mine at St. Stephen.

At Sussex and King Edward Streets was Pandit Ramsaroop's Dharam Shala. It was a huge building. In the top flat lived the Pandit and his family and below lived beggars. Next to it was a cottage in which lived the Youngs. The beautiful and charming Olney Young sat next to me in the Fourth Form at Enterprise High School. I recall her two brothers, Joseph and Compton. Across the road were two more buildings with top and bottom flats each where lived more beggars. My mother used to take me with her to the "Poor House" during the Christmas Season to share pennies to as many beggars as possible. In those days, a penny could buy a glass of pine drink or mauby for one cent and a "whiteye" or bun or aniseed biscuit for a cent. She and my Dad, a Moslem, also held a lunch one a year in the yard at our home as part of their religion of feeding the beggars. My mother would also give a beggar room and bed for the night if he/she had no where to sleep. I recall one such was Buddy Willie. Near the Punt Trench on King Edward Street lived a Shuffler family. I recall Leroy and Lennie.

In a cottage at Sussex and Albert Streets lived the Khan family. One son, Mohammed, called "mamoo" was married to my Aunt Hilda. Another brother Aziz, lived in the small "range" in the back yard. They both ran a "butcher shop" in Bourda Market. Some Saturdays, I used to go there to help my Uncle Mamoo and my aunt. I used to cut up parts of the cow to sell as dog meat and at Christmastime, cut up cowheels

which I sold in parcels at a shilling each. My kind uncle would give me a shilling, a princely sum, for my morning's labour, and a fabulous lunch.

There was a large house at Sussex and La Penitence Street. I believe that the name of the family was Vigilance. Next to it was Paul's (Chinese) Garage. And a little further down was a yard in which "lightwood" crates were made for Peter D'Aguiar's soft drink business.

At Sussex and Hunter Streets was also a tenement yard with several cottages. In one lived the Wilkinsons. Reggie and Clarence attended St. Stephen's school, as did I. A popular figure on Hunter Street was Herman Gomes, well known as "German" and another Portuguese guy known as "Mannie Born Drunk."

At the corner of Sussex and Barr Streets, on the eastern side, lived Mr Ho-Yow and his family. Mr Ho-Yow owned a Drug Store opposite the Fire Station between Lombard and High Streets, obliquely opposite the Olympic Cinema. His son Vernon, in later years, and I worked at the Licence Revenue Office on Brickdam.

On the western side of the road lived an Indian family who made vermicelli. It was a great sight to see rows and rows of strands of the product, cream, brown, white and some red, spread out on straw mats and placed outside of the house to dry in the sun. Later on, the family business was modernised and chow mein noodles and macaroni were also produced.

There was a cinema in Albouystown. Its name was Capital, later Rio. It was located on La Penitence Street, just next to the Punt Trench. My parents took me there every Holy Thursday night to see the movie "Passion Play". The wooden benches in Pit and seats in House and Balcony were more populated by bugs (Guyana kind) than by patrons.

Opposite the cinema was a parlour. My favourite snack there was a fishcake and bread and a small lemonade.

Next to the cinema, on the western side, was a "long range", and in it lived a Mr. Martin who was in the B.G. Volunteer Force. He also worked at Fogarty's.

The cinema was not appreciated by my mother who was a devout Jehovah's Witness, as mentioned before. My two brothers and I used to walk all the way to Kingdom Hall on Croal Street, above the law offices of C.V. Wight et al, on Sunday nights for church service. On the way back, we would take the long route and stop by the Rum Shop opposite La Penitence Market, to listen to a Jordanite preach. Brother Paddy was always entertaining. There was a robbery/murder at the Rum Shop one night. The owner was robbed and murdered. Three men were arrested and one who gave evidence for the Crown is reported to have said that the owner was murdered because "dead men tell no tales."

One Christmas, while attending a Children's Christmas Party at Ramsaroop's Poor House, in my bag of sweets was a complimentary cinema ticket. My mother permitted me to go to the Astor Cinema on Boxing Day morning to see two Westerns featuring Roy Rogers. I was not allowed to go in Dress Circle because I was barefoot. I was only six at the time.

What I remember distinctly at that time of World War II was the national siren blowing on several occasions. It was also a time when many rumours circulated about German spies in Georgetown and in Mackenzie.

I never stopped going to the cinema after that but only on Public Holidays. Pit was three cents and if you sold an empty black lemonade bottle you got a penny or a large empty rum bottle (a "biggie") to Dictator Rum Shop on James Street, you got a 'half-a-bit' or six cents.

Growing up, the movie rule was relaxed just a little. The problem was when a good movie was on at night at the Empire Cinema on Middle Street. It was too tiresome to go all the way around St. Stephen or Adelaide Street. The quickest way was through the burial ground. Its three gates were however closed and padlocked at night. One night, when the serial Drums of Fu Manchu was on, I walked to the Sussex Street Burial Ground gate, climbed over it, walked to the Louisa Row Gate at Princess Street and climbed over that too. Reaching the cinema after that was a cake walk. I was prepared for the midnight journey back. As I climbed over the gate, I took out fegs of garlic which I had in my pocket, threw them one by one over my head and whispered " Pity, pity poor boy, sorry for me". No spirits/ghosts, bothered me.

I never saw a spirit but my mother believed in them, especially when the dogs, looking into the Burial Ground, howled mournfully. My mother had a Hindu Priest write words in a strange language over the doors and windows.

We were never permitted to make friends or lime in Albouystown. I joined a group that limed at the concrete rail at Camp and Princess Streets. The group included "Squeeky" Hinds, Carl Agard, Geddes Stoll, "Cobo" Van Sluytman, Derek Spooner "Featherbob" Featherstone and 'Carrie' Carrington.

Each street in Albouystown had drainage 'gutters' on both sides. They were all shallow mud trenches, reeking of vile odour and teeming with green moss, ringworms and tiny fishes we called 'cackabelly'. It was not until the late 1940s that the British Government replaced them with concrete drains. The mud 'gutters' was another reason Albouystown was called 'slum'.

Garbage in those days used to be collected from "yards" by enclosed horse-drawn carts. Each yard had a large steel tar or oil drum at its bridge in which garbage was put. The carts and horses were stabled and parked in the afternoons at a large Municipal Place on Water Street, next to the Demerara River, and obliquely west of where Bettencourt Department Store was located.

There was no electricity. Homes were lit by kerosene lamps. They were about 12 inches high, with a round glass base containing the kerosene oil, a copper coloured attachment to it that contained the wick, with a wheel to turn the wick up and down, a round, silver coloured metal shield at the back to keep the heat away from the wooden wall and reflect the light to the front, and of course, a glass chimney. It was not easy reading and studying under such lights but I got accustomed to it.

My father had an old Victrola gramophone. The playing arm used tiny, silver Birdseye needles which were kept in a small tin. The only "78" records we had were two of Christmas Carols and the other was an Indian one with songs sung by, if I recall, Lata Mungeshkar. You had to place a new needle in the arm, wind up the apparatus with a metal handle, push the turntable to get it going and quickly place the needle in the first groove of the record.

We also had an ancient, funny-looking Philco radio that my father bought for \$5 from a Portuguese radio repair person by the name of Mr. Virgil. I recall that when the BBC world news was being broadcast, neighbours came into the yard and some sat on the steps to hear the news, especially about the progress of World War II. There was also a full house when the short-lived World Heavyweight Boxing match between American Joe Louis and German Max Schmelling was aired.

Our yard abounded with giant crapauds and scorpions, some black like sin, some brown and some green. I was bitten several times by scorpions, "blown on" by crapauds and bitten by "hairy worms" and had to be rushed to the Number One Dispensary on George Street, Werk-en-Rust several times.

Biscuit (crackers) was a favourite breakfast item, eaten with New Zealand cheddar cheese or Dutchman Head cheese or reddish salt butter. My parents bought our stocks in large, square 'drums' from the biscuit factory on Harel Street, near High Street. A drum of broken biscuit was cheaper and contained both salt and sweet biscuits, 'Edger Boy' and 'Edger Girl'. The factory was opposite "Count Orloff" Charles' Wheelwright place. Charles built and repaired wheels for donkey and dray carts. In those days the wheels were made of wood with iron rims.

There were quite a few Drug Stores in the 1940s Albouystown. There was one on James Street next to the Dictator Rum Shop; Green's Drug Store at James and Barr Streets; Jeeboo Drug Store at James and Hill Streets; Kailan's Drug Store on Hogg Street; Kawall's Drug Store on La Penitence Public Road and near to it, and Booker's Drug Store near the Sussex Street trench. Twins Drug Store on James Street, near Hunter Street, and on La Penitence Public Road, adjacent to the Market, were set up a little later. Ragnauth also opened one next to their grocery on Upper James Street and Lil Boy sold some pharmaceutical items from his grocery on James Street near Curtis Street.

There were at that time, five religious places or churches in Albouystown. One was the Hindu Ashram on King Edward Street, Brother Buntan's Church on James Street between Cooper and Victoria Streets, a church on Bel Air Street, near the water tank and one at Hunter Street and Punt Trench Dam. The fifth was the Coptic Church on Non Pareil Street.

There were three tailor shops, one at the south-eastern corner of James and Non Pareil Streets, another on James Street between Hunter and Barr Streets and the third on James Street near Albouys Street. A tailor who worked in the latter was my ex-brother-in-law whom we called Brother Kissoon. He was my niece Olivia's father. His family lived next door. Three of his nieces were Patti, Finey and Bibi.

Next to Buntan's church lived, as I vaguely recall, the Cozier family. Mr. Cozier walked around Albouystown with a pushcart from which he sold 'Shave Ice' in the shape of a heart, diamond or a club, lathered with thick, red syrup. Sometimes he would put some Blue Cross condensed milk on top. He rang a bell constantly to let customers know he was around.

There were no Government schools. Residents of Albouystown had to send their children to schools in adjoining Werk-en-Rust and Charlestown. Such Schools included Freeburg on Norton Street; St. Stephen's at St. Stephen's and Princess Street; Broad Street Government; Carmel RC School at Charles and Sussex Streets and St. Philip's on Smyth Street.

There was a YMCA, a two-storeyed building at Albouys Street and Sussex Street. It had a ping pong table and there was training in boxing. I attended Sunday School on the upper flat of the building.

'Ice Fish', iced grey and red snapper, was sold from time to time at the Ice Depot at James and Hogg Street.

Near to the shop was a "long range" and often, there were large fishing nets hanging out to dry in front. On Hogg Street, next to James Street was a Rum Shop. Around the corner on James Street was a popular Barber Shop and across the road, adjacent to La Penitence Public Road and above a Chinese Grocery where I used to go to buy salted pigtail and salt beef for my Mom, was Dr J.P. Lachhmansingh's Medical clinic.

There was a Bata Shoe Store on La Penitence Public Road. And next to it was a bicycle repair shop. At the Punt Trench Dam corner was a parlour where sweet cassava bread and cassava bread were sold. It later became a rumshop. Across the road was a Chinese Restaurant. Behind La Penitence Market,

adjacent to the Demerara River, was a large sawmill where my father bought cartloads of sawdust from time to time to cover our dirt yard.

At the Market, fruits and vegetables were sold along the concrete parapet outside the iron-fenced rectangular structure. The vast array of fruits on sale included: whitey, cookerite, owara, corio, bananas (apple, fig and Cayenne), genip, jamoon, mango (buxton spice, long, foo foo, turpentine), sapodilla, gooseberry, starapple (light green and purple), goldenapple, somatoo (passion fruit), custard apple, sugar apple, soursop, monkeyapple, guava (red and white lady), cherry (plump red and Suriname), grapes, psidium, mamee, cashew, avocado (green and purple), tamarind, yellow plums, locust, pomegranite, pineapple, dunks, starfruit (five fingers), orange, tangerine, papaw, and grapefruit
Inside the market were shops or stalls which sold food, grocery, hardware, cloth, meat, and many other items. At the western end was the seafood section where fishes of all kinds, including catfish, hardhead Thomas, kwakwarie, cuirass, kasee, bangamary, four-eye, queriman, gilbacker, basha, two-belly basha, butter fish, grouper, snapper, sea trout, silver fish (churi churi), sunfish, hassar, patwa, hoori, lukunani, hymara, luggalugga, dew fish, mullet, cuffum, snook, paccoo, salted morocut... and shrimps, prawns, crabs, sheriga,etc.etc. were sold.

A great day for the folks of Albouystown was once a year when 'Banding', whatever that was, 'opened'. When it did, the residue of sugarcane crushing, locally called 'lease water' , dark in colour and smelling of molasses, flowed into the Sussex Street trench and fishes of all kind, probably drunk from the odour or the water that reached their gills, floated on the surface. We filled our colorful mokra basket bought from Miss Ismay, with fresh fish that day. The biggest fish we got on one occasion was a 'cuffum'.

There was very little excitement on Non Pareil Street except for two incidents in the late 1940s. The tenants in the flat above Jimmy Ragnauth's Parlour and Grocery awoke one morning to find a sharp, shiny cutlass on a table in their home and some of their property stolen.

The other incident occurred early one Sunday morning with the shouts of "Ole Higue, Ole Higue". A fair-skinned, middle-aged, Indian woman, with blood trickling from both sides of her mouth, hands tied behind her back, was being whipped now and then with a manicole broom and being led by an angry mob to the Ruimveldt Police Station.

Conclusion

A man is not always defined by where he was born or the circumstances of his birth. I became a journalist, District Administration Officer, Licence Revenue Officer, Chief Information Officer, Ambassador, Commonwealth Expert, Consultant-Government of Fiji; Consultant to Fiji's Mission to the United Nations, received the Order of The Nile (Third Class) from Egypt, travelled to over 60 countries and lived in quite a few.

My family and I now live in Springfield, Virginia, U.S.A. I am retired.

Growing up in Guyana in my young days was paradise and Non Pareil Street and Albouystown, wonderland.

END