

Clearcut

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The Ken Gordon School of Communication, Creative and Digital Media



***“Find peace
in simply
doing the work
that matters.”***

Remembering Mr. Nanton

By Kirk Bhajan

Some people live with an unassuming strength. They don't seek the spotlight. They don't solicit recognition. Instead, they shape the world through the lives they touch. Mr. Joel Nanton was one of those rare individuals.

I first encountered him in 2017, when I was awarded the Future Critics Prize at the T&T Film Festival. I was out of place, a South person past the Caroni Bridge, to receive an award that lay in the fringes of filmmaking. However, I was met with curiosity, warmth and

encouragement by Mr. Nanton, who saw me not just as another student but as someone with great potential.

A year later, fate brought me back to him as a student in his investigative journalism course. Under his guidance, I embarked on solving the

story of a missing young woman, a story without an end, as she remains missing to this day. Mr. Nanton encouraged my hunger for truth but tempered my obsessive tendencies to dig deeper into the case. He kept me grounded and cautioned me when my efforts put me in danger.

It was only after I left COSTAATT that I fully understood his impact. His lessons became part of the way I saw the world, the way I wrote, the way I thought.

I'm reminded of one of the oldest stories known to humankind - The Epic of Gilgamesh.

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Remembering Mr. Nanton

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being a popular journalist or author, attaining a kind of immortality through fame and recognition. But life and the wisdom of Mr. Nanton taught me something else. There is peace in simply doing the work that matters. In writing, in questioning, in learning. In leaving behind something, no matter how small, that carries your soul forward.

Mr. Nanton Gilgamesh, a mighty king, is searching for immortality, believing that he can only escape death through notable acts of heroism. But his journey reveals a deeper truth - immortality is not found in eternal life, but in the legacy one leaves behind.

Mr. Nanton fought valiantly for years against a cruel illness, one that took him before his time. But his legacy remains. This very publication, the student newspaper he envisioned, stands as proof that his voice has not faded.

I once dreamed of

understood the weight of stories, how they could shape us, haunt us, define us. He did not solicit praise and recognition. He did not need the world to chant his name. He did not need validation from others to define his life. Strangely enough, it was living this type of life that made him great. Every word written by a student he mentored, every report delivered by a graduate, every journalist who sharpened their skills under his guidance - those are the echoes of his actions.

And maybe that is the truest form of immortality. ■



Play of the Sailors



Kirsten Skinner

Kirsten Skinner's *Play of the Sailors* depicts the regal revelers in shadow, acknowledging their faded presence on the festival stage while celebrating them as foundational figures. The nostalgic piece encourages us to march ever forward, strengthened by the spirit of our forebears.

You can see more student artwork and creative writing in the Art & Literature section, which begins on Page 19.

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Joel's Work

By Jada-Lee Condappa-Lewis

I don't recall exactly the first time I met Joel, or the first words spoken between us, but I do remember the last. It was a WhatsApp message exchange on May 21 2022, when I reached out to ask how he was, because he had been on my mind. He replied that the doctors could not do much for him again; nevertheless, he was in the "Hands of God, believing, as always, for the miraculous, as He who started and kept [him] will finish the work".

I often wonder about "the work", Joel's work.

In retrospect, I'm sure Joel thought of me as "a lot of work". I was the young, impulsive, passionate, willing but not always ready "wayward Jamaican". Joel, affectionately called Mr. Boss, gave me space to grow as an employee and colleague, grace to make mistakes and learn but always held me accountable, as he did others around him. He authorised "walkabouts" with my photojournalism students, and saw the humour when estate police confronted my videography students for filming without permission in one of the Magnificent 7 (they got off with a warning). He also advocated vigorously for access to video and editing equipment, and partnerships with local media houses. His quick, dry wit and ability to expertly extract the most cogent soundbite from the most verbose student (or lengthy meeting) made him a dynamic and trusted educator. Outside of his administrative duties, he worked tirelessly to provide quality instruction and opportunities to students whom he hoped could change and improve the media landscape.

Joel's life and work were rooted in his love for his family and his commitment to them and God. His devotion to family underscored all his interactions and decisions with others.

When I became a mother, and returned to work after maternity leave, I found myself in Joel's office on that first day back, sobbing, unable to catch my breath. Joel held my hand, rubbed my back, and waited quietly. In between heaving sobs, I cried that I didn't want to leave my baby home. I wasn't ready. He sent me back home and in another 10 weeks, I was stronger and ready to



Photo: Ken Gordon School

return. And when I resumed duties, he offered me the privacy of his office to pump, so I could continue to breastfeed. His work as an involved father of 3 and husband to Hollene made him sensitive to needs that transcended his role of "Manager". His default settings of kindness, compassion and understanding moved him from the realm of boss to leader and friend to many.

Joel and I signed up to



Photo: Ken Gordon School

Joel liming with friends and co-workers during a Ken Gordon School Christmas get-together.

further our media studies in 2011, and another type of work began. As classmates juggling families and careers, he shared his notes and insights, and organised study sessions, while I brought the food and incessant conversations and questions. His graduation at Leicester, with his wife Hollene by his side as

sincerity of the messages that made him a sought-after speaker.

His dynamism and eloquence as an orator extended beyond the pulpit and classroom. When I contemplated a drastic career change, Joel's office became a counselling haven. In between timetable issues, student matters and teaching, he guided, inspired and coached when I was hesitant and unsure about my next major career move. His counsel was guided by what he lived and believed, "Always put God and family first. They can always find someone else to fill your job; your family can't replace you. Always choose them". He embodied that belief, and his wisdom and quiet strength bolstered me to choose a path away from COSTAATT and towards another kind of fulfillment. Mr. Boss was excellent at his job, but he was even better in his role as friend, coach and mentor to those who sought him out.

In July 2022, Joel's hands rested from his earthly work, but I'm sure the ripples of his tenure here extend far beyond what we can even know or comprehend. His

colleagues and friends often speak his name with respect, admiration and a tinge of sorrow. Every time I am late for a meeting, I feel his disapproving eye, still. Sorry, Boss. His students can be found in all media houses, continuing the work because he gave them the tools and the confidence to do so.

When I think of his life's work, I recall Proverbs 2:3-5 "...indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." Amidst his pain and a bleak prognosis, Joel reminded me in our last message that he had the knowledge of God, he was at peace with the work he had done, the work which God had done through him and was still doing on him. We can only hope that our lives and work here are half as blessed as his was.

We continue the work, Mr. Boss. May we meet again.

Jada the Jamaican



Home Far From Home

By Faith Cheruiyot

They say home is where the heart is and I've truly found home in Trinidad and Tobago. I am Faith Cheruiyot, a journalist and a Mass Communication student. If someone had told me that a decision made at the age of eighteen would shape the course of my adult life, I would have been reluctant to believe it. The past six years have been filled with experiences that have shaped my life in ways I could never have imagined. What began as a move from my home in Kenya, full of uncertainty and joy, has blossomed into the foundation of a life that continues to offer new opportunities and growth.

After completing high school, my parents shared with me their long-term plan to move to Trinidad and Tobago, a country in the Caribbean that I had never heard of before. The only place I was familiar with in the region was Jamaica, the land of reggae music and dancehall, genres that have captivated the hearts of Kenyans. I vividly remember the move, the excitement of stepping into a new country was all I could think about. From the moment I boarded my first flight to the final landing at Piarco International Airport, the thrill never seemed to wear off. As a new high school graduate, I was eager for the journey ahead.

Surprisingly, adjusting to the culture was easier than I had anticipated. Kenya and Trinidad and Tobago are continents apart, and I had expected our cultures and ways of life to be worlds apart as

well. In hindsight, I find that belief amusing. As I stepped off the plane, the first thing I noticed was the heat. The weather here made a lasting impression, one that I bring up in conversations ever so often. While many African countries experience intense heat, the climate in Trinidad and Tobago was unique in the way that it is so humid, and that first encounter with warm breeze is etched into my memory.

I also remember hearing the Trini accent for the first time, the rhythm and the unique flow of each word. At first, I thought it was a completely different language, and I couldn't understand much at all. Just when I thought I had gotten the hang of the accent, I met a student from Tobago, who is now a friend, and his accent was a whole new challenge. While there were similarities in the dialect, I found it difficult to understand at first. However, as with everything else, I soon became more familiar with it. Surprisingly enough I now naturally incorporate the dialect into my own speech, which often catches my friends off guard when they hear me speak.

The opportunities I've had here have been vast for the past six years. Starting with school, I was able to integrate into the college system with ease and began my studies in mass communication. My four years as a media student have shaped the trajectory of my career in media. The chance to study while working is something I could not have experienced back home.

At a time when I was still figuring out what I wanted to do with my life, I was able to start my career early, a possibility I hadn't expected. In my mind, I had anticipated four years of college and then job hunting right after, however, now it has been four years of college and in my final year now, I have been able to secure a position as a journalist at TTT Limited.

I've been fortunate in ways that I wish my home country would provide for its youth. Trinidad and Tobago has invested in the development of young people, ensuring that even if you don't pursue a college degree, there are opportunities for young adults to find work that sustains them. The variety of subjects available in high school also allows students to explore their interests and passions, which in turn opens doors to future opportunities. The summer courses and youth development programmes offered by the government are all designed to benefit young adults. As a foreigner, I've had the opportunity to take advantage of these courses as well. Before the pandemic, I enrolled in a summer course for hairdressing, a skill I now use not only for myself but also for my sisters.

Trinidad and Tobago

has truly grown on me, and I now feel at home here. The people, the food, the music, and the culture have all played a role in shaping this sense of belonging. As I continue to grow personally and professionally I'm filled with gratitude for the opportunities this country has



Photo: Bocas Lit Fest

offered me. Without a doubt, if you are determined and committed to achieving your goals in T&T, there are countless avenues to make that happen. It's up to you to explore these opportunities and stay driven by your determination, because they are abundant. Whether they seem big or small, one opportunity often leads to another. Ultimately, success is possible, but only if you are truly focused on achieving it.





Photo: TT Parliament

My Youth Parliament Experience

By Jada McLeod

Honestly, I didn't know what to expect- a parliamentary experience sounded like a dream that I didn't know I had. Was it going to be a stuffy, strict and buttoned up affair or would there be room for engagement and practical learning? Was I walking into a room where I would feel as though I didn't belong? The answer surprised even me.

I remember my first day of training. Despite my rushing, I walked into the room with only 10 minutes left to spare. The first thing I noticed was the biting stillness of silence. I began to regret my participation in what I thought was a pretentious affair; dread set in. Coming from

Morvant Laventille, a place where resilience is built, I had never really imagined myself walking alongside senators through halls lined with historical plaques. The polished floors, the tall, straight-backed chairs, and the murmured greetings felt worlds apart from what I knew.

Nevertheless, I plastered a big smile across my face and powered through. The cold stillness slowly gave way to eager and ambitious youth engaging with our nation's leaders. A marketplace of ideas emerged. Without even realizing it, my perspective began to shift. I no longer felt like just an attendee, but an active participant. I understood that holding back my voice—my thoughts, my

experiences—wasn't just a loss for me but a disservice to the dialogue we were creating. For the first time, I felt not only welcome but necessary.

The realisation awakened the debate prowess that helped me take home one of the top debater prizes for my school. It made me realise that it's not just about how well you speak or dress but the weight of your experiences and your willingness to share it.

My first step into chambers felt like taking a step into our history books. Like tangible fantasy, the marble floors gleamed under wooden archways, decorated with the finest craftsmanship of our country on full display. Knowing our politicians get to experience this weekly, how can one not feel inspired to lead?

And that was my main takeaway: How can I not feel inspired to lead? My parliamentary experience has made me think about what duty to country really is. If and when you have something to contribute, you have a duty to do so.

The entire experience

not only taught me about our parliamentary system, structure and polite society, but about how our society governs itself through rules, traditions, and debate. One of the most challenging yet rewarding aspects was adapting my writing style. Transitioning from a formal, structured approach to the lively, persuasive style of parliamentary debate was gruelling. Debate in Parliament is much more festive. There is so much room for the theatre of it

all. It makes me think of how we penned our first governing morals that led to laws. When we were in powder white wigs working out what the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was going to look like.

It was exciting and nerve wracking. The night before debate day, I could not sleep. I was busy thinking about when one of our mentors snatched my paper out of my hands because I was reading my speech instead of actively debating.

I kept thinking about what new evidence points my opposition would come up with. Essentially, I was agonising over everything that could go wrong the next day. Alas, morning comes for everyone but the dead.

When I got to Port of Spain, I could not even eat. I had one sip of coffee and headed upstairs to meet my fellow opposition members with whom I had one last caucus. Cheers of encouragement and goodwill were shared. We lined up to enter the chambers, and right before I could go in, I was pulled aside by my mentor, Mr. Johnson Greenidge. And as if my heart couldn't beat any faster, he told me, "I am



Photo: TT Parliament

expecting a lot from you today, do not disappoint."

If there was an anxiety scale, I was doing numbers! The proceedings began, and the air buzzed with a mix of formality and anticipation. I glanced around and saw members of the media stationed like scouts, the sharp glow of red camera lights signals that we were live—broadcasting to television screens and YouTube feeds, reaching an international audience. To my surprise, I began to feel calm. I was aware of everything, yet in that moment, nothing felt like too much to handle.



Photo: Marquise Acres

The day flew by, I delivered my contribution on the

The 5 minutes allotted to me had once felt like too

importance of creating AI systems with special needs students in mind. This is a topic that hits close to home as my younger brother has Down syndrome, and I personally see how AI helps with the social integration and learning capabilities of this demographic.

The awards ceremony began shortly afterwards. After listening to my colleagues' powerful presentations, each one impressive in its own way, I didn't expect anything extraordinary for myself. I knew there were participation awards, but I had no idea that there were awards for 'Best Debaters.'

As the names of those receiving such accolades were called, I sat there, detached, thinking that the recognition wasn't for me.

Then, I heard it. At first, I didn't quite register what was happening. It took me a moment—or three—to realize they were calling my name as a first runner-up for the Best Debater award. For someone who has never debated professionally, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride and achievement.

What was something that once had me feeling like an unworthy outsider; I realised I had made my mark. ■

Community Empowered

By Ryan Bachoo

If Trinidad and Tobago is to emerge out of the societal challenges it currently faces, community colleges will need to be key.

Community colleges like COSTAATT are seldom considered a first choice for tertiary education. The University of West Indies was, and largely remains, the standard. Foreign universities are also preferred by those who can afford them or attend them on a scholarship.

Despite being the country's first institution to receive ACTT accreditation, COSTAATT had to work hard to make the public, particularly young people, aware of the value of its degrees here, regionally, and beyond. The misconceptions about community colleges often come from a place of misunderstanding. In other instances, they're a reflection of willing ignorance.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, UWI has produced some of the region's most accomplished citizens. As a remnant of our colonial

past, we have grown accustomed to our students winning scholarships to study in the United Kingdom, and colleges in the United States have also become part of our academic story. Most of the region's heads of state and Nobel Prize winners followed some version of that path.

But we all have a part to play in shaping our country's future. And community colleges like COSTAATT provide opportunities for all of us to shine.

One of those aforementioned Nobel Prize winners, VS Naipaul, spoke with disdain about this country's standardised secondary school structure. Passing the right number of exams at the right time as a teenager immediately opens certain doors. But not everyone is built that way, and that narrow filter threatens to waste some of our best and brightest.

We must be more open-minded about why students might not be able to meet that benchmark. Every student's socio-economic situation is different. Some students are held

back by circumstances beyond their control. Time and again, though, we see young people emerge from a challenging period as more mature individuals who are better equipped to handle studies.

In my time at COSTAATT, I found the community college to be a common meeting point for students on different paths to congregate and share in a more common journey. In many cases, they could actually understand each other on a personal level. Just as importantly, community colleges are more affordable for working students or parents in difficult financial circumstances.

Dr. Jill Biden, the former First Lady of the United States, revisited the idea of free community colleges in that country in 2021. Herself an educator, Biden said, "Community colleges meet students where they are. We can't afford to exclude so many from continuing their education just because they come from certain areas or income brackets."

Another critical tool of community colleges is their personal approach to teaching. I can speak from experience when I say there's a huge difference between a classroom (even a virtual one) and a lecture

hall. "Community" takes on additional meaning when we get down to the business of teaching and learning. COSTAATT lecturers work closely with students, relating to each as an individual, and building real academic mentorship and career guidance. It's crucial to helping students excel as opposed to a rigid structure with no room for flexibility.

It's a hand-in-hand approach that prepares students to become strong and capable citizens.

We must remain mindful of the value of Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Programme (GATE) in the current economic climate. If education is the most important tool to help the most vulnerable escape poverty and attain excellence, community colleges will have to play a major role in facilitating some of the most at-risk students in our country. COSTAATT has done tremendous work in changing the image and importance of such institutions to our society, but I will continue to be an evangelist for the central value of community colleges. ■



Photo: COSTAATT



Celebrating Legacy and Vision at Bocas Lit Fest



The COSTAATT team worked alongside the Bocas Lit Fest team to make the 2024 event a success.

By Bocas Lit Fest

For fifteen years, the Bocas Lit Fest has been more than just a festival—it's been a movement. At its core, it's a year-round literary organisation dedicated to nurturing writers, connecting readers, and celebrating the richness of Caribbean literature. But it's also something deeper: a space where stories are told, talent is honed, and voices are amplified. As we approach the 2025 festival, marking its 15th anniversary, Bocas Lit Fest continues to stand as a testament to the power of words

and the enduring spirit of Caribbean storytelling.

A Year-Round Commitment to Literature

Based at The Writers Centre in Port of Spain, which also houses Paper Based Bookshop and Sleepy Cat Cafe, Bocas Lit Fest is far more than an annual event. It's a literary hub that operates year-round, offering programmes designed to inspire, educate, and connect. From workshops and masterclasses for aspiring writers to free book

launches and panel discussions that bring together authors, publishers, and readers, Bocas Lit Fest is a place where creativity meets opportunity. Its reach extends far beyond Trinidad and Tobago. Through initiatives like the 2024 Bocas UK/Madrid/Belfast Tour held in partnership with the British Library, Casa de América, and Belfast International Arts Festival, Bocas Lit Fest ensures that Caribbean literature is not only celebrated at home but also recognised on the global stage. This dual focus—on

local development and international visibility—has made Bocas Lit Fest a force in the literary world.

The Festival: A Celebration of Stories

Every year, the Bocas Lit Fest transforms the National Library on Abercromby Street in Port of Spain into a Literary and Cultural Festival Village. For four days, the library comes alive with readings, panel discussions, performances, workshops, and film screenings, and more

—all inspired by the words, stories and ideas of Caribbean literature. Since its launch in 2011, the festival has welcomed thousands of attendees and some of the most celebrated writers from across the region and beyond. Prizewinning luminaries such as Derek Walcott, Earl Lovelace, Monique Roffey, Olive Senior, and Marlon James have graced the festival's stages, sharing their work and insights with eager audiences.

Another highlight is the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature,

one of the region's most prestigious literary awards. Recognising outstanding works of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction, the prize has celebrated authors like Robert Antoni, Vladimir Lucien, Kei Miller, and Ayanna Lloyd Banwo. For many writers, winning the OCM Bocas Prize has been a turning point, opening doors to new opportunities and wider audiences.

Nurturing the Literary Community

The festival is also a platform for emerging writers, offering them a chance to shine alongside literary giants. During the

masterclasses, and resources tailored to different experience levels, the academy provides writers



COSTAATT volunteers worked as scribes during the Children's Story Telling Caravan.

First Citizens National Poetry Slam Finals, impassioned spoken word artists compete in a battle of wit, oratory performances, and raw emotion. Many of these poets have gone on to build successful careers, thanks in part to the exposure and support they received at Bocas.

In 2024, the organisation launched the Bocas Academy, a groundbreaking initiative designed to help Caribbean writers reach their full potential. Through workshops,

with the tools they need to grow and succeed.

But the focus on development starts even earlier. Bocas Lit Fest's children's and youth programmes, such as the nationwide storytelling caravan and Family Reading Circle, introduce young people to the magic of literature. These initiatives don't just teach youths how to write—they show them how stories can shape their lives, spark their imaginations, and connect them to their communities.



This student had some story telling fun with Zelly, the Bocas Lit Fest dragon.

Hands-On Learning and Real-World Experience with COSTAATT

One of the most exciting aspects of Bocas Lit Fest is its collaboration with students from the Ken Gordon School of Communication, Creative and Digital Media at COSTAATT. Since signing a Memorandum of Understanding in 2023, the festival has welcomed students as part of its team, giving them hands-on experience in event planning, media production, and audience engagement.

These students are involved in both the live and post-production aspects of the event. Whether they're supporting members of the Bocas Lit Fest team, managing aspects of the Children's Storytelling Caravan, or supporting the First

Citizens National Poetry Slam, they're gaining skills that will serve them well in their future careers.

Alette Liz Williams, a COSTAATT alumna and the Marketing and Media Manager for Bocas Lit Fest, has been instrumental in this partnership, alongside her colleagues Melvina Hazard, Children's Programme Manager and Maria Tappin, Prize and Operations Manager. As a faculty member at the Ken Gordon School, she's brought her real-world experience into the classroom, offering students insights into media relations, event promotion, and the art of storytelling.



COSTAATT volunteers helped register entrants for the 2024 First Citizens National Poetry Slam.

Looking Ahead: The 2025 Festival

As the Bocas Lit Fest looks forward to the 2025 anniversary edition, running from May 1 - 4 at the National Library in Port of Spain, there's a sense of excitement and anticipation. This milestone anniversary is not just a celebration of the past fifteen years but also an enthusiastic embrace of the future.

Writer? Avid reader? Get involved! Whether you're volunteering, attending events, or simply soaking in the atmosphere, there's something for everyone. And for those who can't be there in person, tuning in via the official festival live-stream is a click away.

At its heart, Bocas Lit Fest is about connection. It's about bringing writers and readers together, linking the Caribbean to the world, and creating opportunities for stories to be told and heard. It's about nurturing talent, celebrating excellence, and ensuring that Caribbean literature continues to thrive.

For more information about Bocas Lit Fest and its programmes, visit bocaslitfest.com

A Portrait of Excellence: Dr. Gillian Paul

By Zoë Laydoo

"I always loved learning."

Dr. Gillian Paul opened her interview on a 2017 episode of the Caribbean Mentors podcast with those words. And the words defined the woman: her passion for knowledge, and her career helping others unlock their potential.

In the wake of Dr. Paul's death on April 25, 2024, Chair of Digital Media and Communication Sophia Edwards Knox affectionately referred to her as COSTAATT's mother. She was there since the birth of the College in 2000, when she began as Chair of the Academic Affairs Team. Dr. Paul later became Chief Executive Officer and, as the College grew, she served as Vice President of Academic Affairs. For a decade, she tirelessly fulfilled the role of President. But as Mrs. Edwards Knox implied, she was much more than just our President. She and her team spent 22 years developing COSTAATT into the quality academic institute it is today, and in the process, created a family. When asked what she considered her most rewarding accomplishment, Dr. Paul responded without hesitation, "Working on the construction of the Chaguanas campus, which is COSTAATT's first purpose-built campus. It didn't seem possible...

that's a culmination of the work of hundreds of people towards creating this national institution, and it was a point of pride to be part of the process."

Beyond COSTAATT, Dr. Paul was also President of the Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA) from 2005-2009 and served on several educational committees. A strong advocate for education in Trinidad & Tobago (and the region), Dr. Paul was known and respected for her expertise, passion, high standards of excellence, and unwavering commitment to academic advancement. Upon her death, Minister of Education Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly called her "an example of the best of us"; a paragon of hard work and dedication; a giant in the field of education.

In person, Dr. Paul was humble, witty, and selfless. She exuded quiet confidence and elegance. One need only read the flood of online tributes to understand how many people she inspired and empowered through her work and her life.

It all began, however, with that innate love of learning. Long before she became Dr. Paul and

COSTAATT's mother, she was Gillian: a five-year-old girl who fought with her aunt and grandmother to be allowed to attend school. The little girl whose schoolbag was as tall as she was. Her zeal for learning grew in tandem with another lifelong joy: reading. Everywhere she went, she carried a book, she said— "including sometimes going to church, which would cause a lot of drama."

Dr. Paul attended Holy Name Convent, where she excelled, but where she also built lasting friendships. Her former HNC classmates described a teenage Gillian as empathetic, genuine, passionate, patriotic, "a gifted painter", and "a professional extraordinaire."

"My fondest memories of Gillian," her classmate Jacinta reminisced, "were those in Form 1, when I was totally bowled over by her eloquence at such a young age and her extraordinary vocabulary."

Another classmate, Elizabeth, confirmed, "That was a thing at school. Didn't know the meaning of a word? Ask Gillian!"

Her classmate Sharon shared the story of Gillian staging a rescue mission in the name of literature. "I'll never forget the time we heard that [the principal] was planning to confiscate all the Mills & Boon romance novels we young ladies were circulating. It was rumoured that anyone caught with one would face serious consequences. Gill, ever resourceful, somehow

arranged for her father's driver to meet us discreetly at the back of the school, near [our] classroom. Together, we loaded up the trunk with all the books from our class. That memory still makes me laugh!"

While Dr. Paul's mother fed her fondness for reading, her father fanned her spark for languages. She recalled that he often spoke to her in French and sang "O Christmas Tree" in German. This became "an expression of a special bond" between her and her dad.

Because of her all-round proficiency, teachers tried pushing her in different directions—including medicine and law—but Dr. Paul remained resolute. Languages were her first love, and languages she



Photo: COSTAATT



Photo: Oyetayo Ojoade

Zoe Laydoo (AA Spanish) accepts her award as Valedictorian of the 2021 graduating class from Dr. Paul. Laydoo went on to complete a BA Mass Communication degree.

would pursue. She wanted to become a translator and interpreter at the United Nations.

Then came the ticket to destiny. In 1982, Dr. Paul was working as a copywriter at advertising agency McCann Erickson (her first job) when she received a national scholarship. She was headed to Geneva, to the premiere school for translation and

Exorcist was filmed. But my dorm window looked down The Exorcist stairs, and I'm a bit of a scaredy cat." She then promptly moved into her brother's apartment.

At Georgetown, she studied French and Spanish. But in her final semester, her career plans changed. One elective in teaching English as a second language was all it took for Dr. Paul to

one day make on the education system. Yet, even in those early days, her devotion to teaching was so strong that she accepted an unpaid position at NIHERST, where her "love affair with education" truly began. Her enthusiasm and conscientiousness elevated her from administrative cadet in NIHERST's School of Languages to creator and director of their ESL

motivated by ensuring that "we put systems in place for the next generation of leaders within the College so that they have the opportunities that were afforded to me." She believed that passion comes first in achieving success. But she also believed that passion without effort and commitment is not enough. "You have to be able to nurture your passion in [what] you believe you are destined to do."

These values are reflected in one of Dr. Paul's favourite quotes—in French, naturally— "Cultiver notre jardin." Cultivate our garden. It is the last line of Voltaire's novel Candide, spoken by the protagonist after he'd been beaten down by the world throughout

the book. For Dr. Paul, the lesson was, "You can't fix everything, and the world may be a terrible place, but trust me: if you focus on growing your garden, it will be better."

This little corner of the world is indeed a better place because Gillian Paul put her green thumb to work. She nurtured a full and beautiful sanctuary in the time she was given. She followed her passions and discovered her purpose in serving others. She built a legacy of excellence. And in growing her garden, she also helped cultivate thousands of others in the students who sprouted under her leadership, in her team of fellow gardeners who planted alongside her, and in all the other lives she unknowingly touched.

While she is dearly missed, it would doubtless bring her great joy to know that the seeds she planted live on, and the gardens she watered continue to bloom. ■

"To all the listeners, everything is possible if you believe in yourself and have faith in God. He's in charge of everything."

- Dr. Gillian Paul

interpretation. Life, however, was preparing a different path for her. While visiting her brother at Howard University before leaving for Europe, she toured Georgetown University, which, she quickly realised, was where she was meant to be. To study perhaps, but not to live. In the Caribbean Mentors podcast, Dr. Paul confessed, "[At first] I stayed in the dorms, and Georgetown is very famous because that's where The

become enamoured with teaching. She had found her purpose, and her dream of translating and interpreting gave way to a new passion and a new path. "I have no loss of love for it," Dr. Paul explained. "But education is what I was supposed to do."

When she returned to Trinidad in 1986 and received her Teacher's Registration Certificate, she could not fathom the magnitude of impact she would

programme. Ultimately, this became a pivotal stepping stone on her path to home.

Seven months after her death, COSTAATT celebrated the graduation of over 700 students from over 80 academic programmes. The ceremony's theme, "Future Ready, Future Leaders", honoured the woman who once said she was



Photo: Elizabeth Lee

The Future of the Human Touch

By Jada Mc Leod

The wheel, the printing press, and now... artificial intelligence? AI has become the next big thing, influencing sectors like banking, the arts, education and much more seemingly overnight. From the advent of machine learning and automation in the 1950s to the popularisation of generative AI models in the early 2000s, technology has always evolved towards reducing our workload. Will it reduce us into obsolescence?

Meet Aaron, who helps manage a fleet of vehicles for a prominent corporation. The 23-year-old understands AI to be "a tool that's used to assist in our daily tasks". He says, "AI can help us to develop ourselves, if you're not good at writing reports, memos or emails, it provides a foundation for help." That said, Aaron says he rarely actually uses AI platforms like ChatGPT. Instead, he depends on a software tool called Fleetio to help process reams of maintenance data and organise tasks. Fleetio currently features limited AI utility, but appears to be moving towards integrating more of the technology. The company's website touts a variety of AI tools that perform tasks previously carried out by humans.

Still, Aaron doesn't believe AI can replace him. "I don't believe AI can replace me because there should always be a human touch [in the workplace]". He continued, "It can only replace the admin tasks or [be used] as an additional measure to keep documents together."

According to a 2024 report by professional advisory firm Deloitte, about



Image: AI-generated



Image: AI-generated

Young adults entering the workforce during the generative AI boom. How do they feel about this?

a quarter of Gen Zs and millennials (26% and 22% respectively) use GenAI at work all or most of the time. They report feelings of excitement and trust when they think about its usefulness.

Franka, a climate change researcher, believes AI can positively impact her field by processing and analysing climate data more efficiently. The 25-year-old

is ambivalent, however, about how it can impact her career. "I think AI may be trained to take my job in the future, but I feel as though if someone has a wealth of knowledge and experience in their field, they become invaluable," she says. Franka believes that AI could make certain research jobs redundant, but is wary of the technology's propensity to "hallucinate", or

produce error-prone information. "When it comes to research, AI can take that job but would need human oversight to proofread and ensure validity," she says.

The International Labour Organisation champions the use of AI as a tool for workers, but warns against potential risks like unequal access to the technology, skill deficiencies, or human misuse. "When

AI is used to automate tasks, it doesn't necessarily lead to redundancies, as the technology can also complement human labour when certain tasks are automated," the organisation says on its website.

"I would consider myself not scared, but wary of AI," says Ketan. The 27-year-old journalist covers politics and current affairs, and is more concerned about how AI might impact relationships than whether it could cut jobs. "As part of our evolution we are going to adopt new behaviours and habits and that includes the use of AI in the workplace," he says. "My concern is whether or not we are going to lose connectivity to each other and become dependent on [the technology]."

A 2023 Goldman Sachs report warns that due to ChatGPT's ability to enhance mediocre writing skills, "journalists will face more competition, which would drive down wages, unless we see a very significant increase in the demand for such work."

Shervonne, a human resources worker, doesn't think AI presents an immediate threat to her livelihood. "My job requires me to have soft skills like communication, problem-solving and dealing with different and sometimes difficult personalities, and I don't think AI has gotten to the point of doing what I do," she says. However, the 34-year-old mother of two remains uneasy. "It is only a matter of time before AI replaces tasks that humans do."

She added, "People need to think of this as a challenge. AI is forcing us to upskill ourselves." ■

Older? Be Bolder.

By Damian Scott

If you want to view paradise

Simply look around and view it

Anything you want to, do it

Wanna change the world?

There's nothing to it!

For the folks of my era, Gene Wilder's Willy Wonka sang those words as he introduced the children to the wonders of his Chocolate Factory. For me, they hold a more personal meaning, as they have at times given me the determination to persevere. But why am I regaling you with lyrics from a movie that is even older than I am, especially as I am staring down the barrel of a half-century's worth of existence next year?

Back in 2011, I made a conscious decision to once again become a university student. Casting around at what was on offer, I settled upon what, to me, seemed an intriguing prospect – a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication being offered by the (then) Ken Gordon School of Journalism and Communication Studies at COSTAATT. Given my love of languages in general and proficiency in the proper usage of English in particular, I thought that this would be a worthwhile venture on my part.

Alas, it was not to be, for I was told of some upcoming projects at work that would leave me with little time to pursue that



Image: AI-generated

degree. So, by involuntary choice, my dream of having a BA in Mass Comm became a dream deferred. However, I did not let mine dry up like a raisin in the sun...

Just a year later, circumstances shifted in a manner that afforded me quite a bit of vacation time and with that I made the decision to take the plunge and enroll in COSTAATT. I speak of this now to let you, dear reader, know that sometimes life is like that – opportunities arise when you might not be immediately ready to take them on, but when you get a chance, you should grasp it and make it work for you. This is particularly true when you find yourself an 'older student' in the mix.

I can recall the first class that I attended in September 2012 at COSTAATT South Campus. Imagine coming into a classroom and taking a seat and realizing within moments that everyone there is younger

than you, and not just by a couple years. For some that might be a daunting circumstance, leaving you wondering if you are ready or able to fight up with these eager-eyed youths. Further to that, when the lecturer came in, I realised that she was also younger than me (by less than a week but still she could call me 'sir' and it wouldn't seem out of place).

The experience invoked one of the fears that seasoned adult students often harbour – the fear that undergraduate studies are more for the young than for the young at heart. To that fear I would say to hell with it; I am out here for a purpose to better myself and I will better myself because that is just how it has to go! More seriously, you need to really not take on any naysayers and believe in yourself and your abilities. Sometimes you just might surprise even yourself.

I chose to see my

maturity as a strength. I soon reasoned that my age allowed me some vantage and 'advantage' points over my younger classmates. It proved particularly valuable in the study of our evolving relationship with media, because I had lived through substantial periods of said evolution. In addition to that, it helped me to add to and enlighten the perspectives of my classmates. COSTAATT fostered an everyman spirit that I think is absent in other tertiary bodies (like the one that I attended many moons ago which shall go unnamed). Sometimes we forget that education is not just about enriching your own knowledge base and hoarding it in a silo. True education involves mutual enrichment; you make yourself better by making those around you better at the same time.

Before you go further feeling that I was Old Man River in COSTAATT,

I was pleasantly surprised to see several persons significantly senior to me going for academic gold. In fact, some were old enough to realistically be my parent! And, amazingly, a few of them were pursuing degrees in the same department as I was. Imagine how they must have felt having to ramp about with persons who quite literally could be their grandchildren! One thing I know is that I made a conscious effort to encourage them.

By no means should you think that obtaining a degree is a simple walk in the park, though. You need to put in the work to get the job done. You're going to become a juggler by hook or by crook because you're going to have to handle your classwork, employment work and household work all at once, and you can ill afford to let one of those balls slip out of your grasp. You're definitely not going to enjoy the same sleep patterns to which you are accustomed for a bit too. But if you can muster within yourself the perseverance and diligence to see this through to the end, the sky's the limit!

You might be wondering what my sky's limit was. In 2017, as a member of the largest graduating class COSTAATT ever had (the ceremony had to spread over three days to accommodate us all!), I am proud to say that I became a magna cum laude graduate from COSTAATT. Wore my silver cord and tinging! Not bad for an Otaheite urchin, eh? For the hard work and sacrifice, I reaped my just reward, and I want you to do the same.

There's nothing to it! ■

From the Classroom to the Newsroom

By Camille Hunte

I'll never forget my first assignment as a rookie reporter with the Trinidad Express Newspapers—a house fire in 2014 where a six-year-old boy had perished. I had to interview his mother, who had just got to the scene and learned of her son's death. Her heartbreaking screams are still fresh in my memory all these years later. I broke down at the scene and later, sitting behind my desk, trying to write the story. My colleagues told me, "You have to have tough skin in this industry."

While studying journalism, I had been taught to write the facts and keep my emotions in check. But out in the field, I quickly realized it was impossible not to feel the weight of the stories I was covering.

Looking back on my decade as a journalist, I can't help but reflect on how different the reality of reporting hits. Journalism school gives you the foundation, of course, and you won't get a stronger foundation than at the Ken Gordon School. But not even a 4.0 GPA can truly prepare you for what you'll encounter in the real world.

At Ken Gordon, we learned how to write the perfect lead, balance objectivity with storytelling, and the importance of fact-checking. We studied the greats—Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein—and even local legends like Keith Smith who had made their mark in the news industry. We learned to adhere to ethical standards, to remain impartial

and to never compromise our morals. We learned how to gather in-depth information and the importance of protecting sources. We learned the difference between broadcast writing and writing for print media. We learned elements of photography so we could capture the best images to complement our stories. I

died. No classroom lesson can prepare you for those emotions. I think that very moment was when I questioned whether I was cut out for journalism at all. Many journalists covering these types of tragedies and traumatic events eventually become desensitized to it. I can't say that I ever did.

information. You will battle with your own beliefs and your duty as a journalist to report the news.

The pace of the newsroom can be relentless. Deadlines come fast, and everything is constantly changing. You don't experience that while writing your stories in the classroom. But in the real world,

of lawsuits. Many threats came my way, and only one was followed through. But I recall once being threatened with a lawsuit by the parent of a young soca star who had won a competition the previous year but was dethroned that year. I wrote, "he failed to retain his crown," and that choice of words



entered the news media equipped with the best training available. But I soon learned that there are things you can only possibly grasp through experience.

The day after I covered the tragic fire, my byline—"Story by Camille Hunte"—was on the front page. My family called, congratulating me on my first front-page story, but to me, there was nothing to celebrate. A child had

We were taught that you must be impartial as a journalist. But as a human being, it is not so easy. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, several prominent individuals were spreading anti-vaccine rhetoric that I felt was dangerous. I found myself conflicted because we were expected to report their opinions just as we did everyone else's, giving them a platform to spread what I believed to be mis-

it was normal for updates to come in while I was in the middle of writing an article, forcing me to scrap everything and start over because a new angle had developed.

Then there are the ethical dilemmas. For instance, organisations sometimes send you gifts with the unspoken expectation that you will write favourably about them. And of course, there are the lawsuits and threats

earned me a visit from his parent, who showed up at the office with the young man in tow and asked me, "Do you know who I am?!" She flexed the last name of a well-known family in the legal field and told me my story made him cry, demanding an apology. It's amusing in retrospect, but at the time, I was terrified and believed I was going to be sued for making a little boy cry. People will try to intimidate you.

Sometimes you, the journalist, may even become the news. There were countless times when my colleagues and I incurred the wrath of the subjects of our reports, and they sought to rebut or discredit us, making us a part of the story. It's a strange feeling to see your name in print in a story rather than above it. You really do need tough skin to be a journalist.

Don't be scared though. Journalism is challenging, yes, but it is also rewarding. I hold on

to the positive impact of stories I wrote. One of my favourite stories was about Jafar Howe, a Laventille youth who had been accepted into Princeton University—a notoriously difficult Ivy League school to get into. He did not have the funding he needed to go. I interviewed him and wrote his story, and it became the first ripple of a nationwide effort to send this deserving young man to Princeton.

Other media picked up the story, and it spread. For days, the newsroom

was inundated with calls from members of the public who had read the story and were moved to donate. I was bombarded with emails from people reaching out to contribute to his cause – regular people and prominent ones. His story...told in my words. Within days of the story being published, Jafar had met his goal, including a \$US20,000 donation from an anonymous businessman. Jafar got to Princeton... and then some. Today, he holds

qualifications from Princeton in Computer Science and Engineering and is a shining example of success from an area often stigmatized and disregarded. I take pride in the role my story played in his life and many others over the years. Moments like those make journalism worth it, stress and all.

I left the media in 2023 after a decade-long career to pursue a path in PR because, quite frankly, it pays more. Another reality aspiring journalists should know is that you are

highly unlikely to get rich as a journalist in Trinidad. Journalism is a calling. It is a field you pursue for passion, not pay. However, I've discovered that although you can leave journalism, it will never leave you. Even after leaving the industry, I see a story in everything: in the people I meet, the conversations I overhear, even in the routine tasks of everyday life. I see the world through a journalistic lens because, as they say, once a journalist... always a journalist. ■

A Song for Every Season

By Nandy Ramsaroop

COSTAATT no doubt produces professionals of high quality. Sometimes it's humbling to think that person you sat with in an introductory course is now a reporter on television. But do you know the real calibre of geniuses that study and have studied alongside us?

Here's one: Mr. Joseph Williams.

"This song is going to take Trinidad by storm."

That, Mr. Williams recounts, was one of the first reactions to his best-known arrangement, Baron's 2009 Christmas hit "Spanish Woman." He said he nearly declined the opportunity to work on the parang soca tune with songwriter Kurt Moore. He ultimately decided to give it a shot, and the collaboration has become an annual favourite. The song, however, only one example of the art he has created over a career that spans over four decades.

Now 66, Mr. Williams began singing and writing music as a 19-year-old.



Photo: Stefan Jacoo

He's maintained that passion and remained in the industry his entire life, and decided to pursue an AA Performing Arts: Music degree at COSTAATT to better understand musical theory. He says he knows all the practical aspects like the back of his hand.

And what more can we expect, when he has been avidly into music for all his life? He made his radio debut at the tender age of 8 on the then-popular Auntie Kay Show on Radio Trinidad. Decades later, in 2000, he made it into the finals of TTT's Scouting for

Talent. Mr. Williams fondly describes himself as being born a singer- he never knew himself not singing.

The musician's career has taken him to dozens of countries around the world. His fondest memories include representing Trinidad and Tobago in the

legendary Apollo Theatre in New York, and performing at the equally esteemed O2 Arena in London. Despite that level of exposure and involvement with multiple bands, Mr. Williams said he has never been able to master the art of self-promotion.

As someone who lived through the reign of Lord Shorty to the ascension of Ras Shorty I, Mr. Williams is well-versed in the history of his craft. He cited singer-songwriter Richard "Nappy" Mayers as a mentor and inspiration, and spoke about how much music has changed since Nappy's "Ole Time Days."

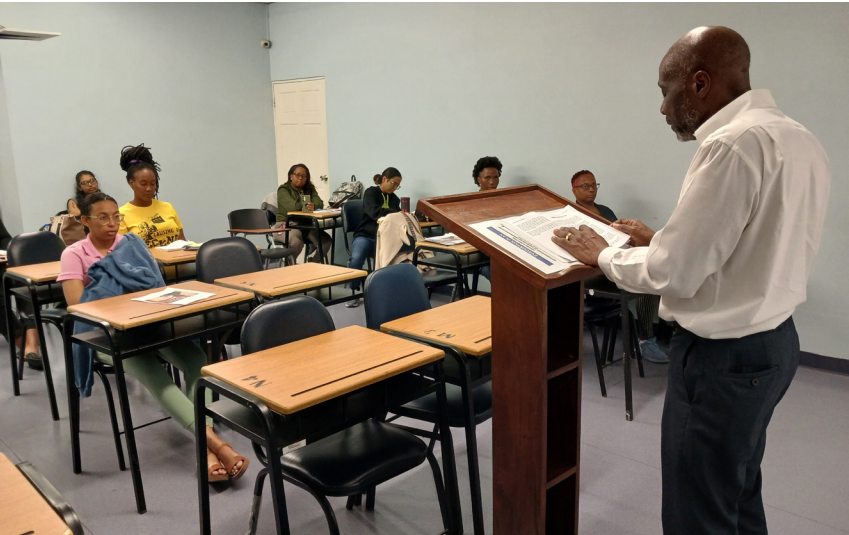
"Everything is conducive to the times. Right now, we're living in very, very violent times," he said. "Look at [today's music] like raging water. Raging water could carry away everything. But if it is channelled properly, it could do good to bring about great electricity and things like that. So the music can be used, can be focused in the right direction."

Mr. Williams became a vocal trainer to provide that guidance to young singers. He believes he was born with a gift, and he intends to share that gift with his students. ■

7 Things I Learned Spending an Evening With Andy Johnson

by Zoe Laydoo

Students at the Ken Gordon School of Communication, Creative, and Digital Media were treated to a guest lecture last November by journalism giant, Andy Johnson, who came to promote his newly published memoir: *From Los Bajos to the World*. A goldmine of knowledge and history, Mr. Johnson gave us no end of valuable insight into his life as a journalist. He read excerpts from his book, told off-the-cuff stories, and answered questions from the small, but fully engaged group. Here are seven things I learned from spending an evening with Andy Johnson.



1. Don't judge a book by its cover!

While the actual cover of Mr. Johnson's book is eye-catching in its own right, the man himself was perhaps not what you'd expect for such a prominent figure. When Mr. Johnson entered the room and glanced at his all-female audience, he promptly quipped, "Where are all the men?"—the first glimpse of the cheeky sense of humour that lies behind the byline.

On the page, he's been described as "formidable": "a journalist willing to ask hard questions and risk upsetting people who do not want to cooperate", who possesses an

"uncanny ability to call prominent personalities into account." Yet one would never guess this from his quiet, soft-spoken presence. He stood before us with no airs, no ego, laidback, witty, his speech sprinkled with the occasional "theatrical profanity" while casually recounting cuss-outs he's had with people in the street. He showed that one can reach the heights of success and remain humble and down-to-earth.

2. Grow where you are planted—and beyond.

As the title of his book alludes to, Andy "Page



One" Johnson was raised in Los Bajos: a small village in Siparia. He sat the Common Entrance Exam (now S.E.A.) three times. Yet, he went on to become one of the most respected journalists in the country—proof that the path of humble beginnings can still pave the way to greatness when paired with hard work and the right attitude. Despite his myriad accomplishments, Mr. Johnson remains faithful to and proud of his roots, as seen in his decision to hail out his hometown and community in the very title of his book.

3. High standards make the man.

When asked what he thought of the state of journalism in Trinidad today, Mr. Johnson replied, "When I read the *Express* or the *Guardian*, very often I could rewrite every single one of the stories. That's just the standard that I have." Those who excel in

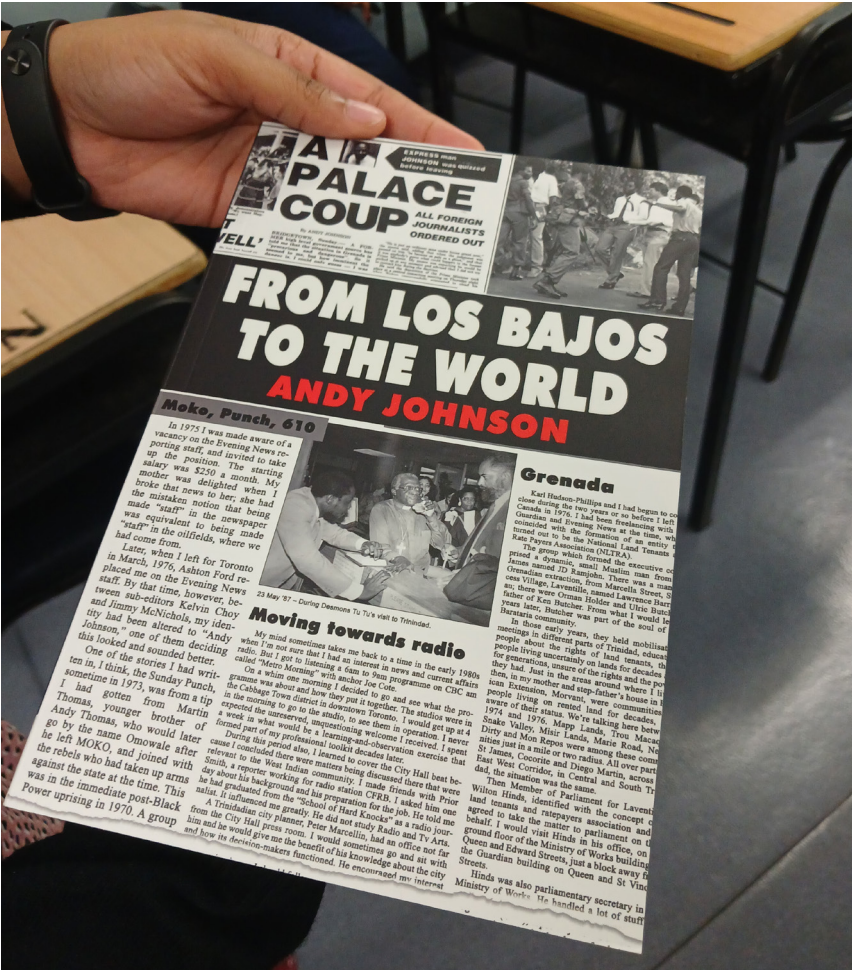
their field often maintain an uncompromising standard of excellence. Many veteran journalists like Mr. Johnson agree that while the media industry has grown since their time, the quality, perhaps, has not. He remains meticulous.

"Somebody would have a sentence like 'I was in this discussion where so and so happened'; well, a discussion is not a place!" he scoffed, laughing. "A discussion is a thing, you know? Or a circumstance. 'A discussion in which' not 'a discussion where'."

"People sometimes don't realise that exercising high standards and precision in seemingly trivial things like these is what builds a reputation for excellence," he explained.

4. A journalist's life is never boring!

We know this in theory, of course, but Mr. Johnson's stories brought home the reality of what the



job entails. He described some of the challenges he encountered, like the redubbing of an interview he conducted. He talked about being among the first journalists to cover the 1979 Grenada Revolution. Navigating that island during the rule of the People's Revolutionary Government led to at least one interrogation, as well as a brief moment during a car ride when he thought he was going to be abducted and dumped over a hill.

5. Not a boring job, but certainly a demanding one

Still recounting the Grenada revolution, Mr. Johnson hinted at the

toll the job sometimes takes on one's personal life. In order to get on an emergency flight to cover the Grenada situation, he had to cancel a special date with a new girlfriend he'd been neglecting. She was waiting for him in the newspaper lobby as he was rushing out to the airport. "It was one of those things that happens," he said.

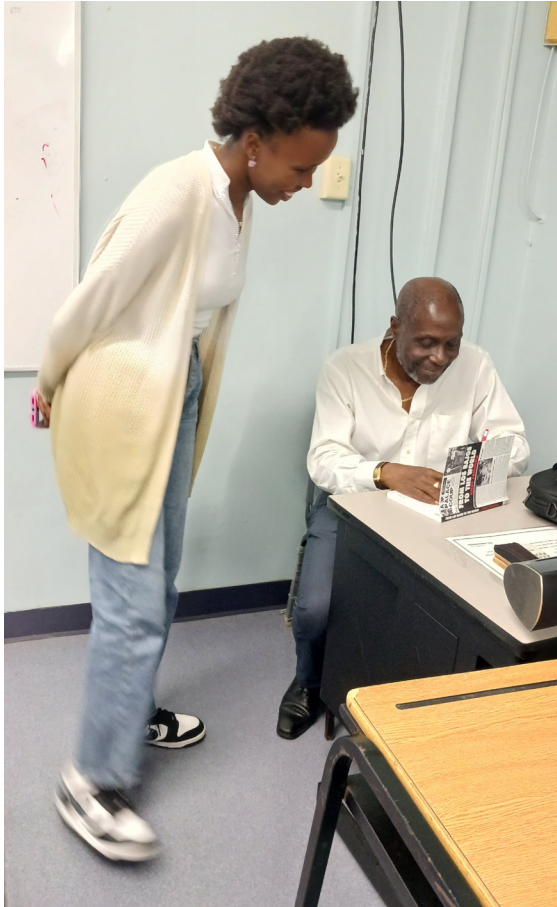
6. History lesson

As mentioned, Mr. Johnson is a fount of knowledge, not just about journalism, but about this country and its history. Having grown up hearing stories from my parents about the 1990 coup, I can never resist asking every media veteran I meet about

what it was like from a journalist's perspective. It's made for some interesting stories, and Mr. Johnson's was no different. He shared what followed after they learned the Red House had been stormed on July 27, 1990, when he was working at the *Express*:

"I just dropped everything. Wesley Gibbings and all kind of people pelting, looking for maxi, and I'm trying to get to the Red House. When I got outside there by the Ministry of National Security on the other side, well you could've gone in that yard and could've seen to some extent what was going on in Parliament, so I got up there and was watching. [There was] A van between there and the Red House

with guns in it and fellas coming to take out guns. Upstairs, we didn't know what was going on yet. And then two fellas came out, one of whose names was Steve Maurice; they were the Prime Minister's security. The two of them came out in their jockey shorts alone with their hands tied behind their backs. I saw that. There were people waiting for them—other special branch people—and they were shaking like a leaf! They walked them out and I walked with them, and they're telling me what transpired in the House in the meantime, and I'm taking notes in my head. I went back to the *Express* and worked until midnight and then had to find my way home."



7. Be inquisitive & determined.

The question-and-answer segment towards the end of the evening gave students an opportunity to mine Mr. Johnson's mind for some golden nuggets of wisdom. "To be a good journalist, you must be inquisitive and be able to synthesise information," he said to a trainee reporter.

As an aspiring author, I asked him what it takes to write a book. He stressed that determination is key. One must remain persistent and keep at it. His own book, he said, was years in the making. But as I watched him read passages that he had penned, with a small smile etched on his face, I understood that the reward is worth the effort.

On Your Own Timeline

By Virmala Balkaran

In a world where every milestone becomes a public declaration, it's easy to feel like you're falling behind. Social media feeds are flooded with engagement photos, career triumphs, and "dream come true" moments, leaving you wondering if you've missed your chance. But here's a truth worth holding on to: you are not late. You are on your own timeline, and the only person you're racing against is yourself.

Comparison is all around us

Social media has changed how we perceive success. What used to be private moments of pride are now public events, curated and polished for maximum impact. It can feel like everyone else is moving forward while you're standing still. But the reality is that social media is just a highlight reel, not the full story.

This selective portrayal can lead to feelings of inadequacy and increased pressure to keep up. Research indicates that while social media can enhance connections, it can also lead to stress and a sense of isolation when used mindlessly. Moreover, studies have found that adolescents spending more than three hours daily on social media are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

This may be easier said than done, but, instead of letting comparison weigh you down, try to see others' successes as proof that yours is possible too. The world is big enough for everyone's dreams. Be happy for others - and remind yourself that their



time has come, and so will yours.

Your success has no deadline

One of the biggest myths we tell ourselves is that success has an expiration date. By 25, you should have a stable career. By 30, you should be married. By 35, you should own a house. These arbitrary timelines don't account for the twists and turns of real life.

History is filled with people who achieved greatness later in life. Vera Wang didn't design her first wedding dress until she was 40. Samuel L. Jackson became a Hollywood star at 43. Colonel Sanders was 62 when he franchised KFC. Their stories prove that success isn't about when - it's about how you persevere.

Even closer to home, think about the people in your own life who took unconventional paths. Maybe it's a relative who went back to school in their 40s or a friend who started a thriving business after a career change. Their

journeys are reminders that it's never too late to pursue your dreams.

How to stay grounded

So, what can you do when the weight of comparison and the fear of falling behind threaten to overwhelm you? Here are some practical, heartfelt steps to stay focused on your own path:

Life isn't a race - embrace your unique timeline.

Remind yourself that everyone's journey is different. Just because someone else reached a milestone earlier doesn't mean you've failed. Your story is unfolding at its own pace, and that's okay.

Always practice gratitude

Celebrate the achievements of others and your own progress, no matter how small. Gratitude shifts your perspective from "I'm not enough" to "I have so much to look forward to."

Set personal goals

Focus on what truly matters to you, not what looks impressive to others. Break your goals into small, actionable steps, and celebrate each one you accomplish.

Take breaks from social media.

If scrolling leaves you feeling anxious or inadequate, step away. Use that time to reconnect with yourself—journal, meditate, or spend time with loved ones.

Seek inspiration, not pressure

Follow people who share their full stories - struggles, triumphs, and everything in between. Authentic voices remind us that the journey is just as important as the destination.

Celebrate the present

Don't wait for a milestone to feel fulfilled. Find joy in the process of growing, learning, and becoming the person you're meant to be.

YOUR TIME WILL COME

When you feel like giving up, remember that your story isn't finished. The things you're working toward may take longer than expected, but they will come. The effort, patience, and resilience you're cultivating now will make those future victories even sweeter.

There's no rush. There's no deadline. Life is about progress, not perfection. You are exactly where you need to be right now, and the best part is that the future is full of possibility. Trust your journey - and keep going. ■

LOG OFF

ART & LITERATURE

Essence and Energy

BA Graphic Design students Katelyn and Kirsten Skinner shared their expressions of iconic Mas characters at multiple Port of Spain art galleries in recent months. The twin sisters used their paintings to experiment with the established figures. Kirsten's Carnival Waltz, displayed in January at the Red House Rotunda Gallery, takes the creolised characters back to Venice. Katelyn's Madame Lorraine was part of the NALIS Traditional Carnival Characters exhibition last September, and imagines a renaissance painter's attempt to capture all of the grande Dame herself. Their other pieces pay similar homage to the form and energy of the festival.



Carnival Waltz - Kirsten Skinner



Tan Tan & Saga Boy - Katelyn Skinner



Pierrot of the Ages - Katelyn Skinner



Madame Lorraine - Katelyn Skinner

The Buck of Silk Cotton Hill

By Kirk Bhajan

One cold October morning, our village was awoken to news that a buck was loose. This came as a shock since Silk Cotton Hill was an unassuming place, tucked deep in the hinterland of the island. The most persons knew about us were the fields of pine-apples which blanketed the hills that bordered our homes in a haze of orange. Now, all of a sudden, we were befallen by claims of an evil presence.

The news came from Pulwattie, who told us that in the middle of the night, a male voice spoke to her. "He tell me to lie down on my back and to open my leg like a scissors," she said. Our first assumption was that her husband Baldeo, was the true culprit. Baldeo was twice Pulwattie's age, half her size, and dark enough to hide in the shadows. However, the couple's solitary child Zaitoon, said he too heard a voice that demanded that he perform illicit acts. Zaitoon was an overweight eighteen-year-old who had dropped out of school after he learned how to spell his name. He helped his father tend their pineapple fields and was by all accounts a slow but harmless young man. We saw no reason for him to lie.

Talk spread quickly and very soon man, woman and child made it their business to visit the family's half-rotted wooden house in the hope of spotting the creature. After that, the men gathered by the village bar to regale us with tales they heard as children involving supernatural forces that roamed the forests of Trinidad.



Illustration: Anne Williams

"It really does have them thing you know," they said.

I was watchmaning a house in Woodland. The thing was short and black and

descendant of a long line of pundits whose lineage traced to Bihar, India, took

One cold October morning, our village was awoken to news that a buck was loose.

"Buck does come from Guyana. They does come up with the Venez them." "I see one a night when

hairly. It used to thief tin sausage and eat." Satyam Gobardhan, a fiery man and the

the matter quite seriously. While most of us in Cotton Hill only made it to secondary school and never

travelled further than Port of Spain, Satyam was a university graduate who had been to Toronto twice. His English was efficient and his voice registered a deep timbre. Whenever he spoke, everyone listened.

"This place full of evil!" he said. "We all have to take a good look at ourselves. If we not careful this buck will start attacking everybody in this village!"

The following week, the buck was at it again. A hysterical Pulwattie said that she was missing personal articles of clothing. Zaitoon complained that a tin of sausages had vanished from the cupboard. Baldeo wept.

Taking matters upon himself, Satyam contacted a reporter he met during his university years. Satyam told us that by bringing attention to the buck, it would frighten the creature away. That day, the reporter came with her crew and we were all excited to see the large, bright red TTT logo plastered on their cameras. They went inside Baldeo's creaky home and stayed for about an hour.

Everyone tuned in to the seven o'clock news that night. The headline was about a teenager who was hacked to death by her boyfriend, and that was followed up by a story about a pastor charged with operating an underground prostitution ring. None of us cared for them; all we wanted to see was Silk Cotton Hill on TV.

After the first commercial break the story finally aired. All three members of the family sat on a worn sofa, squeezed tightly against each other. Baldeo did most of the talking. Half sobbing, he said the creature was tormenting

his entire family and he was fearful for their safety. Footage was shown of Baldeo pointing to his television set, which was tethered to the stand that held it.

"I have to tie the TV down 'cause the buck thief-ing everything in this place. It thief sausage and cheese in the fridge. Last night it take my wife panty," he lamented.

When questioned on the veracity of the family's claims, Zaitoon revealed that he outwitted the creature and had in his possession an audio recording of the demon. Collectively, Silk Cotton Hill raised the volume on their television sets.

A smiling Zaitoon clumsily held his undersized phone in his massive hand and pressed play: "I eh 'fraid no pandit and I eh 'fraid no priest," the voice drawled. "I come from Jamaica to cause trouble because I working for the boss. He tell me he will give me milk to drink."

We then heard what appeared to be the faint meowing of a cat followed by a deep cackle. Then the recording stopped. We all found it strange that the buck broke tradition by saying it wasn't from Guyana. It was also odd that the buck did not sound anything like a Jamaican but rather had our familiar Trini lilt.

"It mussbe staying here long time and acclimatise," Satyam told us.

Baldeo concluded the interview by asking the country to pray for his humble family. Not once did Pulwattie speak.

The next morning, the village was awakened, this time by the sight of a multitude of vehicles. There were reporters from all the media houses as well as representatives of various religions. A Catholic priest

That day, the reporter came with her crew and we were all excited to see the large, bright red TTT logo plastered on their cameras.

from the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Agony walked the entire length of the residence, sprinkling holy water he said was drawn from Mount St Benedict. Also present was a retired lecturer who gave up his dull life, grew a beard and turned guru;

a pastor from Chaguanas who claimed to have wrestled demons and conquered them in his sleep; an Orisha woman who read Psalms 23 and rang a large brass bell seven times; as well as a man by the name of Quinton Briggs, who achieved a doctorate in

parapsychology from an online university, who also moonlighted as a security guard at a primary school. "People taking this thing serious boy!" Baldeo said proudly.

Each one of the divine ambassadors offered to assist with ridding the fam-



Illustration: Anne Williams

ily of the buck but one man remained distant from the crowd. It was our very own Satyam Gobardhan.

Satyam pulled aside Baldeo,

"Plenty of them will say they want to help but they have other plans. It have a verse in the Gita that say 'One may smile, and smile, and be a villain'," he said.

"What that mean?" asked Baldeo.

"It mean they really want your money."

"But I eh have no money. The buck gone and eat out half the pine."

"Doh worry Baldeo," Satyam said as he put his arms assuredly around his neighbour's petite shoulders, "Leave the prayers to me. I will deal with the buck."

That evening when the seven o'clock news aired, Cotton Hill's buck featured as one of the main headlines on more TV stations. Satyam also made it into the story. This time he did most of the talking.

"What is really happening to this family is not something new," he told the camera, "As someone from the village, and as the son of Pundit Chandradesh Gobardhan and grandson of Pundit Bhansie Gobardhan I believe it is my duty, nay my calling, to protect my village from evil."

Satyam leaned in, as if he was about to reveal a great secret, "And let me tell you this, I will wage a great spiritual battle against this creature. And I promise you, this family will have peace!"

As the week passed, Silk Cotton Hill became a circus of mystical performers, and at the centre of the ring was Satyam. More interviews were conducted and numerous articles were written in the local newspapers. Some people said that the whole thing was one big 'Nansi story.

The Buck of Silk Cotton Hill

Continued from Page 21

Others theorised the entire family was mentally sick. But Satyam kept his word to keep watch over Silk Cotton Hill.

Each morning, when the dew still glistened on the dasheen leaves, Satyam would arise, stroll to the ashram in his back yard and perform a pooja. He collected bottles of fresh cow's milk and would feverishly rinse his head and arms with the sacred fluid. He no longer wore garments of Western fashion but was seen in a cream dhoti, his torso bare and his hairy belly jangling with each step he made.

One morning he strode to Baldeo's residence, "Today, today we getting rid of that buck," he said.

His weapons were camphor and sandalwood, a bag of sea salt, garlands of garlic, leaves of red lavender, a thin red candle and faded pictures of Sai Baba and the Christ for good measure.

"Hari Krishna. Hari Hari Ohm," he chanted while he smoked the house with pungent incense.

For five consecutive days Satyam's chants echoed throughout the home of Baldeo. Talk of Satyam's battle against the buck spread and within a week people from across the country soon flocked to our little village to see the buck. From as far as Sangre Grande in the North East, to Cedros in the South, people came. Satyam noticed this. He took on a different role now, becoming more like a Messianic figure for anyone



and Baldeo no longer complained of unwelcomed visits from the buck. By now, most of us had accepted that even if there was a buck to begin with, it had most likely gone by now. We thought the story was harmless and were content with our fifteen minutes of fame in the news. Eventually the buck was no longer seen as a threat, but rather a joke. There were no more articles in the papers, the well of curiosity had dried up and buck memes on social media were few and far between. Even Satyam himself told Baldeo that the buck had retreated and he had nothing to worry about anymore.

In time, Satyam became a regular at Baldeo's home. He would often spend the day with Pulwattie while Baldeo and Zaitoon returned to the daily grind of their pine fields. Pulwattie would feed the pundit hot roti and white eddoes, his favourite meal. Satyam would often be seen under the wooden floorboards of Baldeo's house, rocking peacefully in a hammock. Sometimes Pulwattie would sing Bollywood songs for him.

Christmas approached and we went back to our struggling lives, hoping to earn enough to buy the necessities for the season. Then, when the buck was well and truly forgotten, it returned.

During the middle of the night, we were all awoken to the sound of crashing glass followed by a piercing scream. We scampered outside. It was Pulwattie. She was dressed in a white nightgown and sat in the middle of the road, her long black hair flowing wildly in the wind. Zaitoon was at her side, wiping shards of mucus from his eyes. Baldeo stood at a distance, weeping.

who ailed spiritually. He live-streamed lectures on Facebook and encouraged people to visit his home where they could receive

All this activity did not go unnoticed by the men who sat at the village bar: "Satyam good smart oui. If you see people

million dollars from this."

"I wonder what he go do with all that money boy?"

However, as Satyam

"...let me tell you this, I will wage a great spiritual battle against this creature. And I promise you, this family will have peace!"

the blessings he offered, all for the cost of \$1,500 a session. Day and night Satyam blessed the masses.

going by him to get bless," they said.

"I hear he mussbe make almost a quarter

grew in popularity as a spiritual figurehead, interest in the buck began to wane. Two months passed

His weapons were camphor and sandalwood, a bag of sea salt, garlands of garlic, leaves of red lavender, a thin red candle and faded pictures of Sai Baba and the Christ for good measure.

"The buck come back!" she moaned.

Satyam was promptly contacted.

Bhagavad Gita in hand, Satyam strode toward the growing crowd. He knelt next to Pulwattie, took her quivering hands and whispered tenderly, "Tell me what happen."

Pulwattie's eyes glistered under the moonlight, "I did lying down on the couch watching TV. Then I start to feel a feeling like if I did drifting in a pirogue. I never went on a pirogue eh, but I was feeling like if I was on one."

Someone groaned, "But how the ass you go feel like you was on a pirogue and you never even went on one? What kind of dotishness is with allyuh this hour boy?"

"The buck busy!" another shouted.

"Hush allyuh your mouth!" Satyam hissed at the hecklers, "Let the woman speak."

"Anyway," Pulwattie continued, "I was dey drifting and then I start to feel like my foot getting wet. When I look down and watch, I see a man sucking my big toe! Well I start to bawl and then the thing fly out and break the glass and run outside."

"How did the man look? Can you describe him?" asked Satyam.

"He was small and black. He was good hairy too. Oh gosh you have to help me Satyam! You have to help all ah we!"

Pulwattie covered her face in her hands and started making sobbing noises.

Satyam stood up and addressed us, his chest swollen and his gaze focused.

"Is a serious fight I have on my hands. This thing much more powerful than I thought it was."

He walked over to Baldeo and put both his hands on the man's trembling shoulders,

"Have no fear. I will deal with that buck once and for all this time!"

The next day Satyam

"Or hor. But what I go be doing?"

"Baldeo, listen to me closely, and this is the most important thing," Satyam said in his deep voice,

"You and Zaitoon are to remain right here for the entire time. During that time I want you to light some deya inside the house. Put a bowl of fresh cow milk by the fig tree outside but soak some garlic in the milk. Then when the night fall read a passage from the Gita..."

"I cyar read good, Baba."

"How long ma go be gone for?"

Satyam looked away to a passing cloud.

"A week for the most," he said.

He returned his eyes on Baldeo,

"Doh worry. I will make sure she calls you all the time. I promise you, everything will be okay."

It was the week before Christmas when Pulwattie left with Satyam. Baldeo did not receive a single call from her the entire time.

Stricken with panic, Baldeo contacted the media and told them he

During the middle of the night, we were all awoken to the sound of crashing glass followed by a piercing scream.

informed Baldeo that he would take Pulwattie to the mouth of the Bocas, a tempestuous passage of water off the north-west coast of Trinidad. He reasoned that Pulwattie acted as a type of lure to the creature and his intentions were to draw the buck to her, then capture it. "And when I have him, I go drown him in the sea. He eh go be able to swim in the Bocas," he explained.

Baldeo's face furrowed. "You eh 'fraid she end up drowning instead?" he asked.

"Don't worry. She wouldn't even be near the water. She is just the bait," Satyam replied.

"Well doh bother to read. Just chant Hari Krishna for an hour straight."

"Okay, Baba."

"You sure you remember what I told you right?"

"I remember; light deya, soak some garlic in milk, leave it by the fig tree and say Hari Krishna for an hour."

"Make sure is fresh cow milk," Satyam reiterated.

"Yes, Baba."

Until this point Zaitoon had remained silent but now his eyes squinted and his hand rose slightly,

"Yes son?" Satyam acknowledged.

feared the buck had killed his beloved Pulwattie. The headline that Christmas morning was, "Zaitoon, Where Your Mother Gone?"

The entire country laughed.

Baldeo called the police requesting a search party, but they said Pulwattie had left willingly so there was nothing they could do. The men in the village sat in the bar, drinking puncheon and beer, ruminating on the entire situation:

"Buck my ass. Baldeo too stupid," they said.

"Satyam must be gone Guyana with she for all you know."

For months Baldeo tried looking for Pulwattie. It was rumoured he travelled as far as Toco in search of her. He returned to the village empty handed, his face shrivelled from despair. His hair grew long and matted. His tattered clothes were caked with mud and his skin stank of sweat. He would wander the streets like a lost dog, making frightful noises and baying at the moon.

Zaitoon took full responsibility for the pine-apples, working daily as his father slipped further away. As the years passed, Zaitoon eventually married a girl from Tunapuna and left his village, home and father behind. One time someone said they saw him working at Chang's Hardware in Arima, but no one knew for sure.

Baldeo had since then abandoned living at his house entirely, preferring to haunt the streets of Silk Cotton Hill. In time, he

took on a legendary status, becoming the topic of chutney songs and comedy shows.

On occasion, when all was quiet, and a cool breeze blew through the hills, we would hear footsteps shuffling in our kitchens. We'd look inside our cupboards, only to discover a tin of sausages or a carton of milk had vanished. Sometimes a child would say they glimpsed a small, shadowy figure darting away into the bushes.

And we'd tell them the buck of Silk Cotton Hill had passed through



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