



*Senior*

*Reflections*



## **The Importance of Senior Reflections**

My name is Sharlen Nuñez and I am currently studying for my Associates Degree in Social Work at the University of Belize. I am a hardworking person, helpful, friendly, caring and loving to those around me. I have a wonderful mother, Mrs. Jessica Nuñez, who is a Registered Nurse/Matron at the Southern Regional Hospital in Dangriga; dad, Mr. Davis Nuñez (deceased), five brothers and a loving grandmother.

I chose to complete my first placement at the National Council on Ageing by visiting some older people; getting to know them and listening to their stories.

The senior reflections booklet is based on the life experiences of the six elderly people I interviewed in Dangriga Town and Belmopan City.

I wanted to interview seniors and hear their life experiences because I have always thought that they have so much to offer others, especially a young person like myself. As older people, as parents and grandparents, they help guide us through life based on their experiences and values that are passed down from generation to generation.

In the booklet you will find advice on childrearing, relationships, cooking and many other things. The Belizean people need to be aware of the issues that seniors face on a day to day basis, the concerns they have in respect to healthcare services, financial security and social support. I hope this booklet will therefore inspire other seniors to tell their story and impact the lives of people of all ages.

**Sharen Nunez**

## **The National Council on Ageing Experience**

The first time I went to the National Council on Ageing to apply for a volunteer position, I had no idea what to expect. I knew that the agency focused on the elderly persons of Belize because of its title. But all I wanted to do while volunteering was to have the opportunity to talk to seniors about their life experiences. During my life I have always been around elderly people and have come to love their company because they know so much about life.

During my introduction week as a volunteer, I read information on the importance of the National Council on Ageing and discussed with the staff members some of the issues that seniors face daily and concerns that they would like to see addressed.

This placement has been so interesting for me because I love listening to older people when they talk about their life experiences. I have seen the ways seniors have been treated over the years in my community and I am saddened. The opportunity to volunteer at this organization had given me hope that the issues and concerns of seniors are being looked at.

The information that I acquired from the National Council on Ageing will be shared with friends, family members, social work colleagues and the public so that I can enlighten them to the issues facing older persons.

The information gained from my interviewing experience has also helped me to understand the aspects of a social worker that will enable me to advocate for clients' better quality of life, regardless of ethnic background and socio-economic status.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to recognize a number of people who have contributed to The Senior Reflections presented in this booklet, including the Executive Director of the National Council on Ageing, Ms. Lindy Jeffery, the Programme Officer, Ms. Ix-Chel Poot and my wonderful mother, Mrs. Jessica Nuñez who have given their time and expertise to offer constructive criticisms on selected sections. A special thank-you is extended to each of the following individuals:

- ✚ Mr. Fermin Harry
- ✚ Mrs. Adelia Zelaya
- ✚ Mrs. Ethlyn Lourie
- ✚ Mrs. Gwendoline Zetina
- ✚ Mrs. Manuella Castillo
- ✚ Mrs. Felomena Arana



## Life Experience

**Mr. Fermin Harry** was born in Retinto Village, Retinto Tela Town, Honduras on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1933.

He is the son of Mr. Damous Nunez and Ms. Francisca Harry. Mr. Nunez and Ms. Harry had six children; four boys and two girls. In the village of Retinto there were no schools, cars, toilets and bicycles. It was a very primitive culture and the people relied on nature for food and medicine.

Mr. Harry remembers going to the beach to play and swim with his friends and siblings. They were no adults supervising them at the time because from a young age responsibility was what they were taught by their parents. When it was time to play in the village with friends, toys were not a common thing, so they used wood to make dolls. Their daily intake of food consisted mainly of fish and ground food. The fish was eaten three times a day at intervals and fruits and coconut were eaten for snacks. Ice cream and beef on the other hand were only eaten once a year.

Mr. Harry's grandfather was a fisherman and that was his way of life to support the family. But he also traded contraband from Honduras to Belize. He then decided to send his grandchildren to school to get a good education because he was ashamed of himself not being able to write his signature on a piece of paper.

A few years after, he brought all his grandchildren to Dangriga Town to get a decent education. They all travelled to Dangriga Town in a canoe, around huge waves. It was an exciting trip but very tedious and the destination seemed far away. Finally, when they arrived in Dangriga, Mr. Fermin didn't know any words in English and Spanish because they only spoke the Garifuna language, so it was a trying time for him and his siblings, but they all learned the

English Language. He went to school, learned all he could learn and completed all Standards except Standard six. Life in Dangriga Town was not easy for the family because his father was not around to help his mother, so he stopped school and they all went back to Honduras.

Mr. Harry recalls that in Honduras, they were looked down upon by the dominant culture, which was the Spaniards. The Spaniards treated him and his family very unfairly because they were of Garinagu decent. When he became a teenager he worked at the Mess Hall, attached to a business, as a helper in the kitchen, cooking food for the dominant culture and he made thirty dollars a month. He worked sun up to sun down, same pay and no overtime pay. The only time he had time to himself was on Sundays and it was a very rough and trying time for him. The Mess Hall where they served the employees, black people were not allowed to go in there. Suddenly a strike occurred sometime after and the business closed down and there weren't any other job that he could have done. He tried fishing and farming but he wasn't good at it.

After the hardships in Honduras, his brother got the opportunity to go to New York City and sent for him in 1958. Mr. Fermin got a job in NY and got married to Ms. Ethlyn Laurie. He worked there for thirty eight years before he retired at the age of sixty two and built a house in Belmopan City and moved there.

His best memory from his life is enjoying and relaxing in the comfort of his own home. The worst memory on the other hand was the discrimination of being a Garinagu in Honduras and the way he and his family were treated. The trials and tribulations he faced in Honduras was his most valuable lesson because it brought him to where he is now. When he had his children in New York City he wanted the best for them, to give them everything that he never had and so he did the best that he could have done for them. He wished that he could have done more in life if he was well educated. He wants to see children being more respectful to their elders.

He also has some concerns about the healthcare services which focus mainly on doctors. The incident that had happened to his wife was a scare to him and so he would like to see doctors who are qualified professionals to carry out their work with the correct equipment needed for the patient's illness. Another concern is hygiene because when his wife was in the hospital there wasn't any soap available at the time to wash his hands, no toilet paper or clean water to drink.

Finally, Mr. Henry's goal as a senior citizen is to ride in the cross country but at his own pace. He loves to ride his bicycle daily and enjoys ageing. His advice to other seniors is for them to eat healthy, be careful with their diet, exercise daily and avoid fatty foods.

## Life Experience



**Mrs. Adelia Lockwood Zelaya**, the daughter of Mrs. Eurella Lockwood and Mr. Hilbert Lockwood, was born in Sittee River on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1929. Mr. and Mrs. Lockwood had eight children; five who were girls and three boys. While growing up in Sittee River Village, Mrs. Zelaya attended the Primary School there and remembered playing ring around the roses with friends when it was recess. She also remembered going to the river with her siblings and cousins to swim, even though she didn't know how to swim and as usual, stayed on the banks of the river. One sunny day, they all went to swim and play in the river and when it was time to go to school, they all got out, put their clothes on and scurried to school.

However, one of her cousin in the group went back on the bank of the river to swim in the shallow water and accidentally slipped into the deeper part of the river and drowned. Somebody went to inquire if they had seen their cousin early in the day and they all said yes. Then they all realized that she must have gone back into the river and learnt that their cousin had drowned. Mrs. Adelia was then afraid of ever going back into any river to swim because of the incident. This was a tragedy because they were all so close to each other.

After the death of her cousin, another incident occurred when she went with her uncle and siblings to the river and he threw her far out into the deep so she could learn to swim. She was frightened out of her wits and dog paddled back to the bank of the river and got out. She has never set foot into another river again.



Later on in the years, she moved to Sapodilla Lagoon with her parents and siblings because her father was transferred to be the manager of the Lawrence Saw Mill Company. The saw mill had many workers who took pride in their job and worked very hard to supply for their families. However, due to the fact that it was a big company with a vast amount of workers, the owner decided to venture into another business and that was the construction of the Sapodilla Lagoon Primary School, which was a private school. Mrs. Zelaya then continued her education in which she met her favorite teacher who was a retiree at the time.

At the age of thirteen, she moved to Belize City to live with her aunt to continue her education. The school that she attended was the Methodist Primary School on Albert Street and her two favorite teachers there were Sister Amy Leslie, who was an elderly teacher, and Mr. Tillett from Burrell Boom. While in Belize City, the class that she enjoyed the most was sewing class. She received an award for good sewing which was a book called “The Meadow-Brook Girls Across Country” by Janet Aldridge. Some of her favorite hobbies that she loved to do were baking pastries, creole bread and bun, cooking, knitting, singing and dancing. She worked hard and completed Standard 5, but could not go on to Standard 6 because her mother took her to Dangriga Town.

A couple of years after finishing school, she moved to Dangriga Town where she got her first job as a librarian at the first ever library in Town. Over the years she met a loving man, Mr. Sebastian Zelaya and got married. They had five wonderful children; four girls and one boy. Mr. Zelaya worked at a grocery store in Dangriga Town and was well known to the community for his sparkling personality and he was very good at math. He did not use calculators or the scales for weighing items because he knew how much they weighed just by looking at them. Additionally, while Mr. Zelaya was working at the grocery store, Mrs. Zelaya got involved with

the Methodist Church. She became a Lay Minister, choir leader and president of the Women's League. As part of the church, she went on Women's Retreats in the Caribbean such as Panama City and La Ceiba Honduras. She also went to Los Angeles California, Santa Barbara, Norwalk California and many more on her spare time. During her time at the church though, she was the Sunday school teacher in which she made creative gift bags, sandwiches and prepared lessons for the children. The children enjoyed themselves at the Sunday school and eventually many more came to be a part of the learning experience about God. Since then, Mr. and Mrs. Zelaya have both travelled frequently, but the most memorable was a trip to Los Angeles California when they went on the Queen Mary ship for a romantic outing.

As time progressed, Mr. Sebastian Zelaya passed away and left to mourn was his wife and children. Mrs. Zelaya kept the faith even though it was difficult and moved on. She was then diagnosed with breast cancer and had to go through radiation for the first time. Then decided to take only medication pills and pray to get healed. She is now a cancer survivor who eats healthy and focuses on the Lord.

Some of her concerns or challenges as an elderly person are the medications being too expensive and no transport to get to the hospital when ill. Even though she receives a Social Security Pension of a hundred and twenty five dollars, the bills need to be paid; medications and food must be bought. When all those expenses are met, she has no more finance to see her through for the month.

Furthermore, as a senior, she wishes to see more recreation spaces, better transport systems and more finances. She also prays and hopes that children nationwide would obey and

respect their parents and any other elder persons, work hard to accomplish their dreams and have a positive mind set towards life.



## Life Experience

**Mrs. Ethlyn Laurie Harry** was born in Dangriga Town on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1934; she is the daughter of Mr. John Laurie and Ms. Gregoria Lopez. Mr. Laurie and Ms. Lopez had five children, 4 girls and one boy. As a child growing up in Dangriga she remembers the struggles that they had to face as a family. They weren't rich, but her parents made sure that she and her siblings were well taken care of. Ms. Gregoria used to work at the hospital in Dangriga Town where she washed linens and other apparels in order to take care of her children.

When Mrs. Ethlyn became of age, she and her siblings attended the Methodist Primary School in Dangriga. She completed all Standards and sat the primary school leaving examination in 1951 and passed. After passing the exam she continued to study for another year, but did not remain in school because the principal was not a friendly person.

She then started her first job as a clerk at Hasbun Grocery Store in Dangriga Town and joined the Red Cross. In her spare time she did cooking and went out dancing with her friends. One of her most enjoyable moments was when she went to the club to party with her friends, went on excursions to Seine Bight and other places in the country. In those days everything was calm and people could walk the streets at any time. They were respectful to their elders and authority figures and worked hard to achieve their goals.

In 1970 she moved to New York City where she met a handsome man, fell deeply in love and got married in 1985. She had five children before she met Mr. Harry, two boys and three girls. She found that New York wasn't like Belize because everything moved at a faster pace and

she couldn't walk on the streets at any given time. The traffic was noisy and it took too long at times to get to her destination. She returned to Belmopan City after her husband retired from his job. One of her valuable lesson that she instilled in her children was to work hard and to be there for their children at all times. She wishes that the Government would be stricter with youths as it relates to guns. They have been given too many opportunities to rob and kill other people.

When it comes to ageing she has no problems because she relaxes at home playing puzzles, cooks, bakes and travels. Though she enjoys her old age, she has some concerns about the healthcare services. She had a very bad experience when she went to visit her sister in Belize City. She was sitting down enjoying the company of her sister and husband and started having pains in the chest area. Her husband then took her to the Western Regional hospital in Belmopan and the nurses gave her a basic checkup to see what the problem was, but they didn't have the equipment to take an ultrasound to find out. They transported her to Loma Luz hospital and did an ultrasound and said that she had appendicitis. She was transported back to the Belmopan and they couldn't do anything for her there, so she was taken to the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital.

Finally, she arrived at the hospital and they were ready to operate on her because the appendix was about to rupture inside her abdomen. The doctors and nurses started to prep for the operation by injecting the anesthesia in her body, but she was allergic to it. As the allergic reaction got worst, she couldn't breathe. They inserted a small hole and put a tube in her throat for her to breathe better and the doctors told her husband that she almost died. Three days after, the doctors decided to do an ultrasound of their own and found that nothing was wrong with her appendix.

Furthermore, while this was going on, a hurricane was about to hit the country, so all the patients that were in the hospital had to be transported back to where they came from. Mrs.

Ethlyn went back to the Western Regional Hospital in Belmopan and she stayed there for three to four days. The doctors did not find what had caused the pain in her chest. However, she was diagnosed with diabetes. Since her incident, she wants to see more specialized, qualified doctors in all hospitals who knows exactly what they are doing and also more equipment in the hospitals that will enable the doctors to do their jobs correctly.

## Life Experience



**Mrs. Gwendoline Elizabeth Steven-Zetina** was born on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1935 in Banana Bank, Belize, Central America; she is the daughter of Mr. Leopold Steven and Ms. Agnes Burns. Mr. Leopold had 34 children and Ms. Agnes Burns had 18 children, some children from both parents died. When Mrs. Zetina was born, she stayed with her parents and siblings in Banana Bank for some years until she was old enough to move to Belize City with her aunt Mrs. Fuller to attend St. Mary's Primary School.

After some time Mrs. Zetina found herself picking up the trade of sewing. Nobody taught her how to sew, but she practiced until it was perfected. She continued with school until the age of sixteen and by that time, Ms. Burns went to Belize City to take her back with her to Iguana Creek for one year. Mrs. Zetina was in Standard 5 when her mom went to Belize City for her.

One year after, she continued helping with household duties and her sewing. While living in Iguana Creek Miss. Gwendoline was swept off her feet by a very handsome and charming young man, Mr. Rojellio Zetina from the Cayo District. Mr. Zetina and Miss. Gwendoline both moved to Central Farm because Mr. Zetina got a job as an agricultural officer and he was in charge of the livestock. They had eight wonderful children; two girls and six boys. Mrs. Zetina was a house wife and she sewed, knitted sweaters and made other creative ornaments.

However, Mr. Zetina was transferred to Punta Gorda Town, working as an agricultural officer, but Miss Gwen felt it was not really a suitable place for her because she wasn't active in any organizations. Later Mr. Zetina was transferred again to another village called Lucky Strike and it was here that Mrs. Zetina made snacks for the children at the primary school and did first-

aid services when the children got hurt. Life in the village provided her with one of her best memories because she was there helping others.

Mr. and Mrs. Zetina moved to Belmopan City in 1981 after Mr. Zetina retired. They raised their children together, sent them to school and enjoyed life to the fullest. Mrs. Zetina then became involved with several organizations such as the HelpAge Centre, Cancer Society, Lions Club, Senior Steps, Flower Show at the Agricultural Show Grounds and being a Lay Minister at the Catholic Church. She also campaigned for the Honorable John Saldivar in Belmopan, as she was a UDP voter since NIP (1958) and is still a UDP voter to this day.

As years progressed, Mr. Zetina passed away and left to mourn him was his wife and children. Later on, she was rushed to the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital and the doctor diagnosed her with an aneurism and gave her a year to live. An aneurism is a bulging weak area in the wall of an [artery](#) that supplies [blood](#) to the [brain](#). In most cases a brain aneurysm causes no symptoms and goes unnoticed but if it ruptures it releases blood into the skull and causes a [stroke](#). In her case, the doctor gave her a month to live, but she is alive to this day. The doctors and nurses treated her with care and she has no problem or concerns as it relates to the health care services provided to her.

Additionally, Mrs. Zetina is a friendly and kind-hearted woman, she volunteers at several organizations to help the elderly with their basic needs. She is a phenomenal woman, because others are her number one priority in life. Therefore, Mrs. Zetina wishes that children would be well disciplined and have respect for themselves and elderly people. In her days, she remembers her parents disciplining her if she did something wrong or said something that was not to be said. Lastly, she would like the Government to help provide for the elderly people in Belize because



they have issues with finance, food, clothing and shelter. When it comes to ageing, she enjoys getting older because she can relax at home, travel and be a part of the different organizations.

## Life Experience



**Mrs. Manuela Castillo Sabal** was born on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1941 in Newtown, Stann Creek district. She is the daughter of Mr. Nicodemus Castillo and Ms. Martha Thomas. Mr. Nicodemus had five children, three girls and two boys. Ms. Martha Thomas had four children, two boys and two girls. Mrs. Manuela lived in Newtown village for some years as a child with her parents and siblings until a hurricane hit the village, so they moved to Hopkins Village. As a child growing up in Hopkins she attended Primary School, played games with friends and struggled hard to get her work done. She later went to live with her mom in Seine Bight Village and completed her Primary School years there.

Mrs. Manuela moved to Dangriga Town after finishing school and got her first job at Section Plant in the Stann Creek District. When the Section Plant closed down, she got a job at The Citrus Products of Belize Limited reaping oranges and grapefruits. It was a hard and tedious job and she remembered lifting heavy “kro kros bags” and carrying them downhill to be processed. In those days, everybody had to work very hard, getting up in the mornings to do house chores before going to work and after work prepare supper for their children. While doing so, she met a handsome man in Dangriga and fell in love, got married and had nine children, six boys and three girls. Two children have since died and now there are seven children remaining.

Over the years, her most enjoyable moments were dancing, buying clothes, shoes and other accessories when she got paid from work. Every two weeks when she got paid, she made sure to buy her dresses and shoes to do something that she loved, dancing. Some of her hobbies are baking creole bread, creole bun, cassava bread, cooking and sewing. In the past, she used fire hearths to cook hudut, tapou, bundiga and many other Garinagu dishes. It wasn't easy for her

because the smoke from the fire hearth was too hot, but the food had to be cooked. When dealing with the cassava bread, it took great skills to grate them without chipping the finger nails and doing the other things that came along with that. As time progressed, she explained that now things have changed since she has modern technology to make cassava bread, creole bread and bun, so the tradition has been slowly deteriorating. She would like to see the youths work harder for what they want to accomplish in life, be compassionate to one another and stop the violence.

Therefore, when it comes to ageing, she is quite happy and has no problems getting older. But one of her main concern is finance. Social Security does not give monetary pensions to any senior citizen and she did not qualify as a senior and would like for all elderly people to get some finance that will help in paying utility bills and buying food items. She was a part of the Helpage Centre and received some help and then stopped. Now she relaxes at home, visits family and friends, bakes and cooks.



### Life Experience

**Mrs. Felomena Arana** was born in Dangriga Town on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1926. She is the daughter of Mr. Cortono Palacio and Ms. Lucia Arana. Mr. Cortono and Ms. Lucia had six children; two died, four males and one female remained. Mrs. Felomena lived with her god-mother in Dangriga Town because her mother was living in Honduras and her father lived in Dangriga and had his own life. She attended Primary School in Dangriga and completed all six standards. During her school years she used to go to the farm every morning before going to school to cut the bushes and reap fruits and vegetables. In the evening, when school was over, she went back to the farm to continue her duties. She also remembers her god-mother being very strict so she did her work, went to school and as soon as everything was finished she returned home for supper. After completing school she got married to a very handsome young man and they had seven children; three boys and two girls. Two of the boys died a few years ago.

Several years after, Mrs. Arana went to work at Citrus Products of Belize Limited in Pomona. She worked in the section area and shipping area. She fertilized the fruits and reaped oranges and grapefruits. While working at CPBL, her children were in Honduras with their grandmother. Life was hard because she had to work extra hard to get things done and supply the needs of her family. When she got older, her mother wanted her to go to Honduras to get her children, so she took a leave from her job and went on her way.

One of her best moments growing up was dancing and singing. Wherever she heard the drums knocking she made herself known to dance. Even though she has aged, she has no complaints because she is still dancing, singing, cooking and walking. She still has the rhythm to go way down to the floor when she dances and the majority of the younger folk cannot do it like

her. Since she is a Garinagu, she dances, sings, cooks and prays at the Temple and still takes part in the rituals.

Additionally, she wishes to see Belize the way it was back in her day; peaceful and without any violence. She would like the Government of Belize to put a stop to criminals that kill other human beings and punish them for their wrong behavior instead of letting them out of jail to do it again. It saddens her to see that the murderers are let loose from prison and remain roaming the streets while the parents, friends and families of the victim mourn. When it comes to the violence, even though she lives with her daughter in the Lakeland area, she is quite contented and not afraid because if she needs help, she looks to the persons in the UDP council of Dangriga. She is a die-hard UDP from since she was a little girl and would never change her party.

As a senior of Belize, her advice to the youths is to love one another and respect those in authority. She is also instilling those qualities in her children to respect and love each other through good and bad times. Finally, she wants to see more recreation centers, transportation to go to the hospital and more senior discounts at grocery stores. Mrs. Felomena is a hard working woman, very compassionate and respected by the community. She continues to pray that one day all senior citizens will become a priority and be given the necessary help needed.