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From the President's Pen

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only".

Those were the words of Charles Dickens in the opening lines of his 1859 historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The quotation seems so appropriate for the situation in which we find ourselves currently. We had it "all together", life was moving in exactly the direction that we wanted. The ability to chase after the mighty dollar, the wherewithal to purchase in person or on line what we wanted, not what we needed. The world was our oyster to travel wherever or whenever we wanted.

Then one day a virus appeared in Wuhan, China, but that was very far away. After all, it takes an aircraft 34 hours to get there, so no impact on this side of the globe. Suddenly, it seemed as though a supersonic jet made the trip, and on January 27, 2020, the Coronavirus, with the new name COVID-19, landed in Canada.

What has happened since that time, seems to be all a whirlwind. Schools closed for March break, and have not reopened, businesses, category after category shut their doors, social distancing and isolation became the buzz words and practice of the day. No more visiting friends, joining each other for dinner, lunch or breakfast at your favourite restaurant, grandparents not allowed to hug their grandchildren, no visits to long term care facilities or hospitals to see loved ones. Thousands, if not millions of Canadians out of employment, business owners with life-changing decisions to make and an overall sense of fear, given the uncertainty of the times. A new normal was on the horizon.

On the other hand, in Dickensian contrast, we have seen the best of our fellowman. Neighbours and strangers lending a helping hand to each other, utmost support and recognition of frontline health care workers, zero to hero for professions like grocery

workers, truck and bus drivers and personal support workers. Managers, forced to develop trust in employees to work from home, families spending more time together, learning more about each other and parents becoming home school teachers. The streets are devoid of vehicular traffic, sidewalks are devoid of human traffic and the Ottawa Light Rail Transit seems to be performing perfectly.

As a result of the aforementioned circumstances, at a recent videoconferencing meeting of the Executive and Social Committees, a decision was taken to cancel the TTAO's planned activities up to and including the ever popular TrinbaGo Day 2020. A decision will be made during the first week of August, on the Independence celebration (corn roast/picnic) planned for August 30, 2020. The Soca Parang, scheduled for November 8, 2020, is still on the calendar. You will be kept informed of the final status of these two events.

The Humanitarian Committee has been kept very busy, making telephone calls to those members who are "shut in," either in their own homes or in public/private institutions. Should you know of anyone in our community who falls into this category, please contact a member of the Committee, listed at the end of this newsletter, or send an email to tandtassociation@gmail.com. A committee member will be more than happy to contact the recommended individual(s).

The TTAO lost two treasured members recently, Yasmin Asgarali and Nazru (Naz) Deen. Yasmin was the pleasant face, with the brilliant smile, that you would see taking pictures at many TTAO events. Naz Deen, was the consummate philanthropist, who made donations to the C.L.R. James Scholarship Fund and other relief efforts, as well as his expertise to the TTAO. He was particularly interested in the education of young people. The Executive of the TTAO has unanimously decided to add the Nazru Deen Scholarship to its roster of activities. Further on in this newsletter, heartfelt tributes are paid to Yasmin and Naz.

The TTAO Executive and Committee members are thinking of you during this very difficult time. We extend our best wishes and the hope that you and the members of your family stay safe and healthy.

Ingrid John-Baptiste

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TTAO 2019 - 2020 List of Activities

December 2019



Sunday, 8 December

Children's Christmas party

Trinidad and Tobago High Commission, 200 First Avenue, Ottawa

April 2020



Friday, 17 April **CANCELLED**

Meet and greet

May 2020



Saturday, 30 May **CANCELLED**

Spring Fling

Ottawa Masonic Centre, 2140 Walkley Road, Ottawa

July 2020



Sunday, 12 July **CANCELLED**

Boat cruise on the Ottawa River



Saturday, 25 July **CANCELLED**

CARIVIBE parade (Ottawa's carnival)

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August 2020



Sunday, 16 August **CANCELLED**

TrinbaGo day



Sunday, 30 August

Independence celebration

Trinidad & Tobago Association corn roast, family picnic, FUN DAY
Location to be confirmed

September 2020



Saturday, 26 September **RESCHEDULED**

Health seminar

Coalition of African, Caribbean and Canadian Organisations
Details to be confirmed

November 2020



Sunday, 8 November

Soca-parang

Ukrainian Banquet Hall, 1000 Byron Ave, Ottawa

December 2020



Saturday, 12 December **RESCHEDULED**

Children's Christmas party

Overbrook Community Centre
33 Quill St, Ottawa

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In Memory of

My Selfie Sister:

A few thoughts on a dear friend and a life well-lived by Nira Dookeran



When I was a little girl growing up in Winnipeg in the 1960's and '70's, one of the many life lessons I remember my father teaching me over and over was, "get involved, contribute to collective efforts larger than your own personal life. In this way, you will make many wonderful friends, learn so much more than you ever could on your own, and enjoy the satisfaction of helping to make the world, even if it's only the world of your own modest reach, a richer and better place for your sincere efforts".

I imagine that our dear friend and *jahaji-bahin* (ship sister), Yasmin Asgarali-Glassford, must have gotten a similar message in her years growing-up. Because, as I learned in the days and weeks after her shockingly unexpected and untimely passing in February of this year, Yasmin's life and generous efforts reached far beyond her own rich personal life, to a diverse and rich array of wider community involvements.

Some of us knew Yasmin primarily through her involvement with the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Ottawa (TTAO). I cannot exactly say the date, place and time that Yasmin became a member of the TTAO. What I can categorically say however is that she was a positive addition to our community, particularly when she agreed to serve as a floor member and become involved in various committees.

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Her gentle spirit, pleasant smile, and often ‘outside the box ideas’ spirited the direction of the TTAO to another level of operation. It was however her view of the TTAO from behind the lens of her camera that Yasmin became so well known for. She was appreciated by our members, friends and supporters, here in Ottawa and anywhere in the world where the www.ttaa.ca website was accessible

Many of us also knew her beyond the world of TTAO, both personally and through shared community involvements. She was always ready to attend an event to which she was invited or get involved in one worthwhile community event or another.

I remember in 2018, she invited me to help co-MC a Multicultural Pageant and Celebration, the brainchild of impressive community organizer, Gipsy Ghosh, at Algonquin Commons Theatre. Little did I know what I was getting myself into! It was an ambitious effort, far beyond what I had anticipated, that grew so quickly, that the following year, in November, 2019, it packed the Horticulture Building at Lansdowne to overflowing. I still remember Yasmin, working feverishly behind the scenes to count ballots so we could announce the winners of various pageant categories, and then emerging, smiling and cool as a cucumber, recording highlights of the evening with her trademark camera.

I remember she invited me once to a picnic at a little park off the Rockcliffe Parkway. It was for a group called the Canadian Association for the Club of Rome (CACOR), which I had never heard of before. Googling it, I learned that its main objective was to “further the sustainability of the global ecosystem, including the survival of humanity”. What I experienced, in addition to the well-informed and spirited discussions with retired geologists and other scientists, former federal public servants, and the like, was a warm, open, inviting atmosphere and a generous picnic feast. As always, Yasmin, after introducing me around to break the ice for this “newcomer”, was enthusiastically capturing precious moments with her signature camera.

There are of course many other such invitations and community involvements, as many of you will have experienced with Yasmin. Perhaps you may have heard about

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this for the first time at the beautiful Celebration of Life, organized by her family, and held in late February in downtown Ottawa. So many people from so many different walks of life stepped up to the microphone to share their memories of and appreciation for how she had touched their lives. From volunteering, to helping with the online presence of CACOR (Yasmin shared her technical skills generously, and anyone who followed her on Facebook knows she was a tireless recorder and promoter of worthwhile events and people on social media), to more personal tributes and tears from friends whose lives she had clearly touched deeply. In addition to her wide-ranging community involvements, Yasmin was always ready with a personal invitation to a health seminar, a yoga class, or a women's empowerment group coaching session.

At the traditional Muslim prayers held after her passing, I met Yasmin's family, including her former husband Mark Glassford, whom she had met at the University of Manitoba when they were both students in the late 1970's. It was Mark's acceptance to study architecture in Ottawa that had brought them out east from Winnipeg, where her family had lived since immigrating from Trinidad to Canada in 1969.

I met her mother, a somewhat small and delicate-looking woman who, when she got up to share a mother's stories about Yasmin as a little girl and as a grown woman charting her own destiny, spoke with formidable strength and forthrightness and the kind of no-nonsense, unsentimental, matter-of-factness and life wisdom we all know affectionately as "West Indian parenting". Listening to Yasmin's mother reminded me powerfully of my own Nannie (my mother's mother) and the solid, common-sense, grounded wisdom of that generation. It was clear to see where so much of Yasmin's confident, generous, enthusiastic approach to life had come from.

We also had a chance to meet her brother and sisters, all of whom still reside in Winnipeg. And her beautiful daughter and son and their partners, as well as nieces, nephews and other family and friends. It was abundantly clear how well-loved and well-appreciated Yasmin was.

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In the end, like many of you, I will miss Yasmin's warm, sincere smile, and her infectious enthusiasm. I will miss how much fun it was to work with her on various community events and projects. I will miss the ever-present camera and the endless selfies posted to her Facebook page. People often, even at the services held to commemorate her life, asked if we were sisters as they thought they detected a family resemblance. And Yasmin would respond gleefully by taking many selfies of the two of us, to demonstrate that, indeed, we did look remarkably similar! I personally think she was just happy to have another excuse to take and post selfies, "but dat is jus" my opinion!

If there is one lasting message I would like to take with me from crossing paths with Yasmin on this all-too-brief life journey, it is to live life fully and joyfully, with an open mind and a generous heart. To live our gifts with confidence and authenticity. It was after raising her children and retiring from a full career in the federal public service that Yasmin took up her early creative love again, and evolved into "Yasmin, the photographer", who recorded so many of our celebrations together. She was bold and had an appetite for life, for new adventures, for meeting new people and contributing to new endeavours. There was almost always something playful and light and girlish about her, and I think that is because she approached her life with such genuine enthusiasm. It reminds me of a quotation I have on a little card on my piano to remind me that "You don't stop playing because you grow old; you grow old because you stop playing".

I think Yasmin never stopped playing with life. Embracing and pursuing the creative possibilities of her own life to explore and learn and grow. When I think of her, that is what I want to remember most of all.

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In Memory of

A Giant Has Fallen: Nazru Deen



Nazru (Naz) Deen was born in San Fernando, Trinidad and attended the Vistabella Canadian Mission School. He completed his secondary education at Naparima College, and at the age of 20 migrated to London, England. After a few years of studies, Naz received his teaching diploma and later his L.L.B Hons from the University of London.

Naz was the consummate teacher and mentor, who always put his learners and mentees first, regardless of age. He was wise even at a young age, and assumed responsibilities of others willingly and devotedly. It began with his own younger siblings, whose homework he supervised nightly, and then with cousins, who he mentored. One brother recalled that he continued to supervise their homework after moving to England, often sending educational supplies and reference materials to enhance their chances of success. He even recorded his voice on a 78rpm record to keep them inspired and comforted.

As he became a husband and eventually a father, his love of learning extended to his own children and grandchildren, whom he loved and cherished deeply. He celebrated their educational pursuits and achievements with lasting pride. He loved his community and admired those who strove to improve the lives of its inhabitants. He was always proud of his ancestral roots and valued their influence on his philosophy of life.

His abiding principle that education was a key in determining future success, carried

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through into all aspects of his life and became a lifelong pursuit. He was a voracious reader and had an enquiring mind, whose interests ranged widely by topic, time period and cultural background. I can't remember ever speaking with Naz and not learning something new. He was a "giant of a man". Remarkably, his humility remained intact even with the acquisition of all the knowledge that he had.

His generosity was not punctuated by race, or any of the biases that have evolved to sew the seed of racial discord. The fervour with which he served on the now defunct Emancipation Committee was as sincere as that with which he welcomed the first time celebration of Indian Arrival Day in Ottawa. In fact it was his dream to jointly celebrate Emancipation Day and Indian Arrival Day. Over the last couple of years, the Caribbean Hummingbirds Cultural Association satisfied his wish and incorporated Emancipation Day, with some degree of success, into their Indian Arrival Day celebration.

Naz was a staunch supporter of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Ottawa (TTAO), whether it was by supporting their activities or most recently by donating to the C.L.R. James Scholarship Fund. In 2017, when he published his book "No Better Life", he donated 25% from the sale of the book to the TTAO Scholarship Fund. That year the scholarship was awarded in the name of Naz Deen to Sheniqua O, a student of the St. Dominic's Home (Belmont Orphanage) in Trinidad & Tobago.

His brother Kamalo wrote the following facts in a Facebook tribute:

- He was the first in our family to attend high school.
- He was an original member of the teaching staff of the San Fernando TML school.
- He was a founding member and early President of the Baden Powell (BP) Sports Club.
- He was a founding member & President of the Gasparillo Islamic Group (GIG).
- He was the first in our family to migrate when he left for England in the 1950s.
- He was the first in our family to be a university graduate...LL.B (Hons.) London U.

Naz was a devoted family man. Through all of his successes, he was ably supported by his dear wife Bea. Heartfelt condolences are offered to Bea, his sons David and Paul and his grandchildren Nathaniel, Penelope and Beatrice, from the Executive and members of the TTAO. May he rest peacefully.

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Jahaji Family 2020.....a personal reflection by Nira Dookeran

I'm sitting in my living room, having just watched the daily 11:15 press conference by PM Justin Trudeau on CBC. My head is spinning with the speed at which global realities and daily life have so completely metamorphosed in the last few weeks. My heart is heavy with the tremendous suffering and loss happening all over the world, especially with the news we're getting from Italy, Spain, New York, and so many other places.

And yet my heart also swells with humility and compassion and gratitude at the countless ways that people and governments are responding to the global crisis - redirecting manufacturing enterprises to increase production of personal protection equipment (PPE) for frontline healthcare workers and distilleries rapidly transformed to produce hand sanitizer. Canadians, along with others around the world, are banging pots and pans nightly to signal their support and appreciation for the healthcare workers and all other frontline workers, who put their own safety at risk to keep the rest of us supplied with food, medications, gas, and other essential items and services. Neighbours checking in on each other, community groups adapting with phone trees, Zoom gatherings, and many other creative adaptations to keep us as connected as possible during these weeks and months of social distancing and often painful isolation.

Even in these desperate and dire times, it is clear to me that we have much to be grateful for, and that we humans are capable of great acts of kindness, generosity, discipline, and personal heroism in times of tremendous challenge.

Like every other organization over the past weeks, the TTAO Executive met this week, via our first online Zoom meeting, to regretfully agree that all planned TTAO events (set in place in January of this year) would be postponed indefinitely. That includes the Spring Fling in May, the July boat cruise, and even our biggest annual event, TrinbaGo Day in August. Particularly dear to my heart, and to many TTAO members, Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation celebrations have also been cancelled for this year.

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Which brings me to Jahaji Family, a story of an indentured labourer who travels from India to Trinidad in 1850. This movie was written and produced by brothers Kamalo and Shamsu Deen of Trinidad and Tobago. They are the brothers of our own much-loved Naz Deen, who recently passed on. Sincere condolences to his beautiful wife, Bea, and the entire family. The screening of the film was to have been TTAO's first official event of this year, premiering on April 17th, at Centrepointe Theatre in Nepean. Tickets were printed and many of us were eagerly looking forward to the sharing of the story of one family's journey across the "kala pani" (dark waters) to an unknown future in an unknown new land.

Wistfully, I just googled and watched the trailer for the movie, a brief interview with the director, and a TT news story announcing its debut this spring in Trinidad theatres, which no doubt has now also been cancelled until further notice.

And then I got to thinking about the meaning of the word, "jahaji" - "shipmate" or "ship traveller". Over that months-long trip across oceans from India to the West Indies, many Indians, who began as strangers, formed deep and powerful bonds as they withstood the trials of the journey together, and helped one another to survive as best they could through the passage. Upon arrival in Trinidad (and for others, in Guyana, Surinam, Jamaica), a completely new, unknown, and unprecedented experience awaited them.

All of our ancestors, regardless of country or continent of origin, experienced challenges of dislocation, cultural as well as physical, loneliness, fear, loss, desperation, brutality and the sheer struggle for survival. But our ancestors, again regardless of continent of origin, also found ways to learn to live, adapt to change, learn, grow, and ultimately thrive in this unfamiliar new land in which they found themselves, regardless of the different circumstances that had brought them to the twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, as I sit in my living room, CBC TV news on mute, I wonder what to share in this reflection in these profoundly disorienting times. It occurs to me that we are, in truth, one vast global "Jahaji Family", making this journey together on Spaceship Earth. And if this global pandemic teaches us anything at all, it is that, just as those "jahaji bahin and jahaji bhai" became like family on those long and arduous journeys we are also being transformed by this journey into the unknown.

Whether globally, nationally, locally or individually, we can try to help strengthen the

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bonds of support, love, care, compassion and assistance among us, thereby becoming one “7 million plus Jahaji Family”. The undeniable lesson of the coronavirus is that we are all inextricably connected, and what affects one of us affects us all. For good and for ill.

I dimly recall the words of an old calypso, “if we don’t live together, we will die together, whether black, brown, yellow, or blue” (apologies if I got the words wrong; my memory isn’t what it used to be. 😊 That calypsonian got it right, decades before corona.

So, in the end, all I really want to say is: stay safe, stay healthy, stay connected, stay hopeful. Let us look after ourselves and each other as best as we can on this leg of the journey.

After winter comes spring. Some will be planting seeds and seedlings now. My nephew, Isa, and his wife are expecting their first child in September. My family, spread out across TnT, Florida, Tennessee, Seattle, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Windsor, Hamilton, Milton, Toronto, Ottawa, England, and Spain, have started weekly “Trini Family Zoom Limes” every Saturday to keep in touch. It’s a beautiful new family tradition we’ve started that, hopefully, will last long after corona is history.

Maybe the silver lining in the cloud for me is that, while we will not be watching Jahaji Family together next Friday at Centrepointe Theatre, we are all, daily, becoming more and more of a One-World Jahaji Family of the 21st century. May it be so.

Blessings and Namaste.

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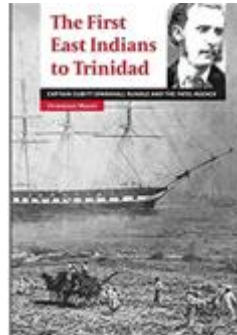
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On the Bookshelf



The First East Indians to Trinidad by Dennison Moore

Of the life of Captain Cubitt Sparkhall Rundle, who commanded the *Fatel Rozack* that brought the first batch of East Indian labourers to the shores of Trinidad in 1845, we know little. And that little is derived mainly, if not wholly, from his scrapbook and from a history of the family written by his son Henry Leslie Rundle. Nevertheless Rundle's career as a sailor affords Dr. Moore an opportunity to dissect nineteenth-century merchant marine society, to lay out how merchant ships worked and what life was like on deck and in the forecabin where the sailors and boys lived.

The author provides a scholarly account of events leading to the ban on Indian immigrants to the colonies in 1838, its lifting in 1842, the year that marked Rundle's entry into the business of transporting East Indian labourers to the island of Mauritius, and of the negotiations which culminated in the decision to allow Indian labourers to migrate to the West Indian colonies of Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidad. Dr. Moore's research on the *Fatel Rozack* has completely upended the findings of researchers about that vessel and her owner Abdool Razack Dugman of Calcutta, findings which they presented on the occasion of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Indian arrival in Trinidad.

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Member's Corner

To enhance what the TTAO can do for the community, we need your support so why not become a member? New members are always welcome! Does an event or committee peak your interest? If you are 16 years of age or older looking to get involved, then consider becoming a member and joining a committee that interests you the most.



The annual membership for the association runs from **September 1st to August 31st**.
[TTAO membership form](#)



The TTAO's website & Facebook page

You are encouraged to visit our [website](#) at ttao.ca and our Facebook page is at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Trinidad-and-Tobago-Association-of-Ottawa-TTAO/157550578878>.

Your feedback and comments are always appreciated.

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TTAO Executive and Committees

TTAO Executive and committees for 2019-2020 will be kept busy planning another diverse and engaging year for you.

The TTAO has been in existence since 1983. The mission of the association is to promote and maintain the integrity of our cultural heritage and assist with the continuing development of nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.

Your 2019-2020 Executive

President: Ingrid John-Baptiste

Vice-President: Dianna Pierre

Secretary: Sharon Pierre-Louis

Asst. Secretary: Judy Madhosingh

Treasurer: Andrew Williams

Floor Members:

Anne-Marie Bostic Nira Dookeran Joycelyn George-Francois

Immediate Past President: Adrian Benjamin

TTAO Committees

Education:

Chair: Dianna Pierre

Andrew Williams Sharon Pierre-Louis Nira Dookeran

Ingrid John-Baptiste

Humanitarian:

Chair: Pat Cholmondeley

Molly Taitt Maurice Taitt Lena Baptiste Pamela Antoine

Judy Madhosingh

Membership:

Chair: Molly Taitt

Ingrid John-Baptiste Andrew Williams

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Public Relations & Communications:

Chair: Brenda Agard Alleyne
Carol Joseph Rose LeBlanc Andrew Williams

Recreation:

Chair: Earlvin Dyer
Pat Cholmondeley Judy Madhosingh Carmen Dyer
Anne-Marie Bostic Glen Mason

Social:

Chair : Ingrid John-Baptiste
Dianna & Tony Pierre Sharon Pierre Louis Andrew Williams
Molly & Maurice Taitt Pat Cholmondeley Lena Baptiste
Trevor & Rosanna Lashley Anne-Marie & David Bostic
Suzanne & Errol Whittier Nira Dookeran
Carmen & Joe Dyer Joycelyn George Francois

TTAO Health Seminar Representatives:

Brenda Agard Alleyne Judy Madhosingh Dr. Alfredo Walker
Ingrid John-Baptiste

We are always looking for participation on our committees, which will increase chances of success. You are more than welcome to volunteer and/or share your ideas so please [contact us](#) if any peaks your interest.

Feedback

Interested in contributing to the next newsletter? Would you like to provide comments or suggestions to the TTAO? Send us an email, write us a letter or put a posting on our Facebook page and tell us what you think!



A reddish pink poui located at the Queen's Park Savannah, Trinidad. Always a captivating sight!
Photo credit: Chris Andersen Photography