

AfroPanamanian Newsletter



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No.4 Vol. III

May 2012

Donation



Panama's

African

Queen

Alejandrina

Lan

(story inside)

Controversy

Anecdotes

Poetry

LOS AMIGOS :
Por la superación de la Etnia Negra

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

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

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

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

Editorial

How to solve a problem or make a decision:

- list all the possible solutions
- discard the least viable
- chose the most viable out of those that are left

90% is now solved
the 10% is to execute

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

May 2012

FEEDBACK (from April Newsletter)

Again another Afropanamanian newsletter that broth back many memories. I new Alberto Smith who was a close friend of the family.

I can make Coo-coo. I use an electric beater and it comes out perfect. What I would like is a recipe for the sauce; the old west Indian way. I think it was called Lavadee Sauce.

God Bless you and your work so we do not forget.

Tony R

Beat the “german” Alzheimer's with coconut oil: (Thanks to Judith Tinker)

http://www.cbn.com/media/player/index.aspx?s=/mp4/LJO190v1_WS

Advantages of Being Bilingual (translated from US Embassy article)

Speaking two languages, instead of one, has evident practical advantages in an increasingly globalized world. Nevertheless, scientists, in recent years, have begun to demonstrate that the advantages of being bilingual are even more fundamental than only being able to communicate with a wider range of persons. Apparently, being bilingual makes you more intelligent. Being bilingual has a profound effect on the brain, improving cognitive abilities, unrelated to language, more so, it generates protection against dementia in old age.

Check out Barbadian Consultation Conference invitation at:

www.foreign.gov.bb/barbadosnetwork

OLDEN DAYS SAYINGS:

First of all, she “**butt in**” the discussion between her two friends. Then she “**pick up**” for one of them and “**keep malice**” with the other one. To her chagrin, the two in the “**cass cass**” “**make up**” and “**keep malice**” with her.

Some articles in Spanish about the braid problem and its solution:



<http://www.laestrella.com.pa/online/impreso/2012/05/20/una-escuela-sin-trenzas-ni-pelucas.asp>

<http://www.midiario.com/history/2012/05/18/escenarios.asp#.T7jUchRIV0.email>

<http://www.prensa.com/impreso/panorama/etnia-negra-reclama-mas-espacios-sociales/93807>

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THE UNTOLD STORY

Our parents and grandparents used bushes to cure their ailments, both in teas, as cooling waters, and applied to the affected area. Miss Louise Bennett (R.I.P.), Jamaican elocutionist, made a record.

Tea	Use
Mint	Colds
Fever Grass	Cold, fever
Sour sap	For fever, cure cancer, eat heart for amoeba
Trumpet bush	Colds, asthma, emphysema (not for people with pressure)
Congo Lala	Colds, asthma Baby cold
Gully root	Many ailments, including cancer
Fit weed	Menstrual cramps, diabetes, purge, epilepsy
Ginger root	Menstrual cramps, flatulence
Elder flower	Cold, neuralgia
Sersi or ceroci	Purge the blood, allergy
Senna	Purge
Cowfoot	cold
Pear leaf	High blood pressure
Marigold	Cold (stop nose drip)
Lydia Pinkham	Menstrual disorders

External use

Sour sap	Poultice for fever
Gully root	Under mattress for chink
Physic nut leaf	Fever, headache
Salvia	Headache, spasms, soaked in alcohol to sap
Aloe	Heal skin problems, rinse hair
Tuna	Wash hair, cure skin problems
Sersi	Body scrub
Pepper leaf	Boils
English plantain leaf	Ear infection (drops)
Cucumber	Eye drops

As water

Aloe	Clean out
Tuna	Cooling
Rosemary	Pour on open mole

**PANAMANIAN AFRICAN QUEEN
ALEJANDRINA LAN**

(excerpted from Alberto Barrow's article BAILA NEGRA, BAILA and translated by Ines V. Sealy)

ALEJANDRINA LAN, the Panamanian daughter of Prince Benito Lan and Queen Zoila Jaramillo was Congo baptized before she was baptized as a Catholic. As a Queen, she was trained to protect and conserve the ancestral African culture, which is what she has done all her life.

Together with her father, Alejandrina visited the existing palisades in Panama reaffirming her knowledge of National Negro heritage. Alejandrina formed her own palisade in the Curundu area in 1957 where she has performed traditional African rites from to her cultural background and education.

This knowledge she has presented to the Panamanian and foreign audiences magnificently, through dances, seminars and courses at schools, universities, and in representations of Panamanian Negroid culture abroad to include: CARIFESTA (Cuba, 1979), the I Latin American Folkloric Festival (Venezuela, 1979), XVII International Fair of San Sebastian (Chile, 1980), the International Fair of Barquisimeto, to celebrate 492 years of founding of the City of Barquisimeto, the XXXIV International Folkloric Festival and XII Parade of America in Asturias (Spain, 1982), the Hispanic Parade (U.S., 1982), the XVIII International Fair of San Sebastian (Venezuela, 1983), The Meeting of International Folkloric Dances (Paris, 1985) and the XXIV Folkloric Festival of the Pyrenees (France, 1987).



So, you see, Alejandrina, this distinguished descendant of the Maroon Bayano, has been a pioneer in these teachings, and, Panama's ambassador of AfroPanamanian Culture abroad.

ANDREL LUTHER LAWSON

by Fernando Goldson

Coming to Panama from Jamaica where he was born, he started working for the U.S. Army at Fort Kobbe in the Electrical Division in 1940 obtaining promotions until he reached the post of Electrical Foreman in 1945 at Howard Air Field.

In 1948, as a result of injustices occurring within the wage system, Mr. Lawson resigned to pursue his own dreams during war time.

Mr. Lawson was contacted by a private contractor to supervise the installation of a new system of street lighting to be installed at Albrook Field, he was also contracted by *Cemento Panama* to supervise its electrical system during the construction of its plant.

Mr. Lawson finally got around to go into business for himself. He opened a bicycle repair shop on the corner of 25 St. followed by a rice and corn mill in *Mariano Arosemena St.* close to the larger mill, in which he sold shelled rice, corn, cornmeal and other dry goods, like those provided now be *Molino Criollo*, in *Calidonia*.

He later opened a High Tension Electrical Shop repairing and rewinding 400 hp & 500 hp. large motors on B Ave. & 21 St. for *Cemento Panama*.

In 1958 Andrel was invited by Max and Eric Del Valle to join the Republican Party. When in 1960 the Republican and Liberal Parties joined forces electing Roberto Chiari as President of the Republic of Panama, Mr. Andrel L. Lawson was appointed Director of Electrification and Related Issues within the Ministry of Public Works where he worked continuously from 1960 until 1978. Although he tried to retire in 1972 Chief of Government *Omar Torrijos* found out and called him in to express his need for his services. As a result, Andrel, with offices in his own home, was made a Consultant to the Government, on High Tension Electrical issues, finally retiring in 1978.

May 2012

JOHN BELL

(taken from his obituary)

John Woodrow Bell (R.I.P.) was the fifth of six children born to Jaslin and Clotilde Bell, in the City of Panama.

He went to school in La Boca, Canal Zone up to the Six grade. He then continued his studies in the City of Panama, later assuming an apprenticeship in Construction with the McGee Construction Company under the tutelage of Mr. Hugh Holland.

His entrepreneurship lead him to make beautiful constructions. Many of the homes in the Canal Zone, Rio Abajo and Parque Lefevre area have a John Bell Touch. It also encompassed the bar / restaurant business, opening in the '50s ,the Johnny B and Joan B. The Joan B. closed , but the Johnny B reopened on September 1, 2011, under the new management of the Brown Brothers: Wesley, Calito and Alberto with 4 days of reveling which included International and local artists before a very mature crowd.



In addition to his work, John was a Community Servant and a Philanthropist. He donated his time, talent and finances in the renovation and building of many churches and other edifices. Some of the projects included the Afro West Indian Museum's refurbishing, the National Baptist Church 4th St. Rio Abajo, the Freewill Baptist Church, 7th St. Parque Lefevre and the Jordan Baptist Temple in 14th St. Rio Abajo.

We lost him on November 8, 2005

Braids, plats, corn row, cane row, and now twists.

Hair has always been a problem for women. It either wouldn't grow, or it grew too thick, or too straight or too curly. Either it wasn't the right color, or length, or texture.

To Black girls growing up, braids or plats, meant you were a little girl, you hadn't grown up yet.

As I remember, until we went to high school, we had to wear plats to school and to church. Of course, the Sunday braids were different from the week day braids. And they were called plats not braids.



“Girl, come and plat your hair”. That meant at least a half hour seated in front of someone while your hair was been braided. Plats were a source of mockery: “*Maria cachitos*” “*Maria moñitos*” “*cachitos del diablo*”, all nicknames used to make us feel small.

Then someone started doing corn row, well, that was a little better, at least the corn row could last several days, if you tied it down. With corn row, the plat went inside, but with cane row, the plat could be seen on the outside, that was pretty. Even the latins started wearing it. Next our ingenious young people started weaving false hair into the corn row or cane row, making designs which became fashionable even for gala events.

Now that we have beautified plats into braids and twists, the school authorities in Panama want to take it away from us: at a school in Panama girls are being prohibited from wearing braids to school. Our culture and tradition says that we wear plats until we are old enough to go to high school, which in my time was 12 years of age.

My mother had no dexterity in platting hair, so I had others to do mine: Granny Gumbs (Maestra Elma's mother); she taught me that you put castor oil in the vaseline to grow the hair, cut the ends three days before or after full moon to thicken the hair, three days before or after new moon to lengthen it.



Put the hair in the garbage of flush it down the toilet; don't through it away, birds will take it and make nests. Don't leave the hair wild, the breeze will eat out the hair.

Girlie Edwards (a cousin moved up from Paraiso), she would comb the hair from the night before, tie it down because she had to go to work early in the morning, leaving her no time to plat two heads: her daughter's and mine.

When it came my time to plat hair, **three heads**, I allotted 10 minutes for each head, meaning I should only spend a half an hour platting hair, whether it be morning or night. **“Loose out your hair” “bring the bench and sit down” - “next”**.

Wash it on the weekend, dry it, grease it and plat it tight. Leaving our hair loose meant tangles and a real hassle to tame it again, especially if you had a “full head of hair”. Did you know that corn row grows the hair? Any “picky head girl” would want to wear corn row to grow her hair.

*Comments on braids by Yvette Modestin
Founder/Director Encuentro Diaspora Afro*

Our HAIR continues to be an intense conversation in our communities and outside of our community. From Panama, to Nicaragua, to the US, Black Women's hair has been celebrated and criticized. Today in Panama it is about wearing "braids" to school. This is about our freedom of expression and our roots. What does your hair say for you? How do you think your hair speaks to your identity? These are some of the questions we can reflect on as we join the Panamanian community in "*Dia de las Trenzas*."

This Panamanian that is "*Orgullosamente Afrodescendiente*" is reclaiming and celebrating with pride, **"HAPPY TO BE NAPPY"!!!**

CANE ROW, LOOKING GOOD

(pictures taken at hair platting session at St. Christopher's School May 20, 2012)



May 2011

Visit Colon before it disappears as we knew it.

More than 50 years later, despite the turmoil on the outside, 'this joint is still jumping'.

(contributed by John E. Edwards)

In the near future this and similar places of Colon of yore will be gone. We revisited a place socialized in, back in the 50s and were surprised to see it still there, despite a changing surrounding scenery regretfully not for the better.

Before SABEB, it was known as *Cafe Jays*, and owned by pianist great Ray Cox, and friends, and who would later be a regular performer, along with Frank Anderson and Dolores Leacock, at Cafe Esquire. The Jays was later bought out around 1959 by five friends who formed with the first letter of their names the acronym and basis for the new name: S-A-B-E-B... It was a hot spot, especially on weekends and Sunday afternoon *Soirées*. It was where we first heard that great calypsonian from *Paraiso*, Black Majesty, along with now famous Carlos Garnett, then just learning his notes and chords. We also enjoyed the likes of Manuel, 'the ringing bell'; Lord Houdini, Sir Jablonski, Cobra, Lord Kitty and many more *conjuntos*.



Back then, the building on the left was the Prophylactic Health Clinic where professional women of the night got their health stamps. Across the Street was home to 'Los Dandies de la Novena' comparsa, and on the other side of Ave. Central was 'El Sol de Cuba' comparsa group.

There is no more Top Shelf and Bottom Shelf drinks. Spenders are now on one level. The bar counter is now different and customers now sit on chairs and not stools as before. The music is now louder, or are we getting older?...:)



The traditional and efficient men's room is still functional and not smelly owing to a constant water flow. The women were not thrilled with theirs.