

B/N Lady Bustamante

Lady B, 87 not out!

THE CLEAN air of Bellencita, in Irish Town, and a staple diet of fish and vegetables, are among the factors that have contributed to Lady Bustamante's crisp appearance after an interesting 87 years of life.

"I feel good. My health is not bad and I have never had any serious ailments in my life. I have had a good life and I thank God," she said in reflection as she celebrated her birthday on Monday with the women of the Jamaica Labour Party.

Dozens of photo albums captivated the attention of her guests and Lady B willingly flipped through them, injecting occasional humour as she reminisced on the good times she had with the 'Chief,' the late Sir Alexander Bustamante.

The nippy evening air rushed up from the Kingston Harbour and Lady Bustamante says she has a problem when the time gets very cold.

Otherwise, she likes to savour the beauty of her gardens and fields, established on 10 acres of gently undulating land, named Bellencita, where she lived with the 'Chief' for 15 years.

The couple had no children, but Lady B says she has been mother to many.

"All the children of the world are mine. I have raised so many of them."

She is also mother to an institution that she is extremely proud of, that is the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) of which she says, "I have been treasurer since 1938."

Though she gets around with the help of a cane these days, she still visits the Duke Street office at least three times a week.

"I still try to go down because that place is very special to me."

She is one of the few living public figures who have been involved with Jamaica's labour struggles of 1938, through to the granting of adult suffrage and heard the first bells of independent Jamaica.

"I have driven to every corner of this country. When Busta first started travelling around and writing letters to the press about the conditions in rural Jamaica he had a vision to see his people better off. I was always right there with him," she reminisced.

She has not lost an iota of her memory, vividly recalling Bustamante's arrest in the 1930s.

"I remained calm. The guys locked down the wharf saying no ship could leave until they freed him. They had him for three days in jail."

She also recalls the many squabbles the 'Chief' had with his main political opponent, his cousin, Norman Manley. "Busta kept nothing against anybody who opposed him. He said politics is politics and left it at that."

She has given the details in her 1997 publication, the 'Memoirs of Lady Bustamante.'

Lady Bustamante says she is a God-fearing Christian with a firm belief in the Creator.

The party of women headed by Carla Seaga, wife of the JLP leader, took pictures with Lady B, sipped wine and enjoyed hors d'oeuvres. Also present were Maureen Shaw, Claire McPherson, Councillor Lorna Leslie, Fay Hutchinson, Councillor Margaret Grant, Joyce Young, Pauline Samuda, Marjorie Vassell, Beverly Prince, Councillor Jennifer Newman, Athleen Brown, Karen Harriot, Rarane Campbell, Cistyn Brown and Sally Porteous.



— Winston Sill
Lady Bustamante cuts her birthday cake while Mrs. Carla Seaga (left) and Karen Harriot look on. ■