

MRS.  
ERNA SEAGA

# A mother reflects on her son

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BY JOY SCOTT

"I would like everyone in Jamaica to pray for him as he takes on the task of leading the country".

This was a mother's earnest plea for her son. The mother: Erna Seaga. The son; Edward Philip George Seaga, Prime Minister of Jamaica.

In an interview with the *Daily News* recently, Mrs. Seaga spoke about her son, his early years and her feelings about him.

Understandably, she is extremely proud that her only son has achieved this high position and she regards it as a reward for hard work. The years as Opposition Leader, the election campaign and Mr. Seaga's hard work over the past few years have paid off, according to his mother, and she feels her son has realised his ambition.

Mrs. Seaga observes that her son has a hard task ahead of him as he tries to rebuild and lead the country and she has urged the prayers and support of the nation.

Asked what incident in his life gave her the most sorrow, Mrs. Seaga replied, "The night he lost the election." She remembers that he was very disappointed as were herself and the Jamaica Labour Party supporters who had gathered at the Belmont Road headquarters.

On the other hand, Mrs. Seaga said her greatest pleasure in her son was when the JLP won the general election last year and she later saw him sworn in as Prime Minister of Jamaica. Her one regret was that his father did not live to share the moment of triumph. Mr. Seaga, Snr. died of a heart attack two years ago.

Reminiscing about his early years, Mrs. Seaga said son Edward was always a diligent student, and at book work even. Said she, "He always did his homework."

## Economics degree

She recalls that in the family home he had a study next to his bedroom and after school he would closet himself there reading, studying, doing homework and research.

"He was never satisfied with just one answer. He always probed other angles to a problem seeking various solutions," she says.

She adds, "He was not what one would call brilliant, but he was disciplined, studious and took his lessons seriously." She said his study was filled with stacks of newspaper clippings carefully marked and dated which he used in his research while at Wolmer's High School.

At age 18 the young Edward went to Harvard University where he completed a degree in Economics. Mrs. Seaga smilingly said her ambition for her first born child was for him to be a doctor but it didn't quite work out that way.

On his return from Harvard he went to the University of London for a brief period. Some friends of the family who saw him, encouraged Mrs. Seaga to send for her son, as he was not doing well in England. She said he did not adjust to the climate, he was something of a loner and the friends thought it would be in his best interest to return home.

He returned to Jamaica and attended classes at the University of the West Indies for a while, but that also did not work. He wanted to be a psychiatrist but could not reconcile the fact that he had to do the full medical course before specialising and he admitted to his mother, "I can't stand the sight of blood."

Quitting studies at the University he decided to pursue his interest in sociology and culture and went to Wakefield, a district in Clarendon. Mrs. Seaga said her husband and herself packed a small bed, a table, a chair, food, a pot, stove and basic necessities into the family station wagon and deposited him at this village where he was to spend nine months observing the lifestyle, culture of the people, placing information on tape and endearing himself to the hearts of the people in this village.

Mrs. Seaga said friends of the family who lived close by took dinner for him each Friday and made sure he was all right. He came to visit his parents once and travelled on a country bus. Mrs. Seaga said he regaled the family with bits of conversation and incidents typical of travel on a country bus and he had managed to get down comments and the general atmosphere on tape. He plans to write a book based on these experiences.

Mrs. Seaga ruefully remarked that it was his father's regret that Edward never took on to the family business. After he returned from the country, he started a recording company representing Colombia records but shortly after

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he became a senator and then was asked to contest the elections. He therefore became too busy to devote the time required to the business and his parents had to finally sell the concern.

Commenting that her son was always concerned about people and what he could do to improve their social and economic status, she concludes that his pride in Tivoli Gardens is well justified and mentioned the love and respect the people there have for him.

It is traits such as these together with hard work, discipline and dedication to his country which Mrs. Seaga feels have helped to prepare her son for his present job.

Asked about the degree of influence she had on him in the past and even now, Mrs. Seaga smiled and said he always respected her opinion and even now at 51 years old he still tosses out an idea and seeks her opinion, although her view does not necessarily shape his final decision.

As a son, "He is the best," according to his proud mother. He telephones regularly to make sure she is O.K., always remembers anniversaries and birthdays and each New Year's Eve he pins an orchid on her dress and wishes her Happy New Year with a kiss.

The Seaga family is a very close-knit one and the mother says that what affects one affects all. The Prime Minister is the eldest of five children and he is the only boy.

But his mother quickly says, "He is not spoilt. He had to take his place in line." All the children keep in close contact with each other up to the present, and between them all, the four girls and one boy have given her 11 grandchildren.

### **Matriarch**

Mrs. Seaga proudly showed photographer, Charles Kinhead and myself pictures of all five children in various stages of growth and I was tickled looking at a picture of the Prime Minister in short pants flanked by two of his sisters.

Mr. Seaga and wife, Mitzie have three children; Jean, who lives in Mandeville, has two daughters who are co-eds at the University of Miami; Faye lives between Miami and Jamaica and she has two sons and a daughter; Patricia lives in Naples and has a son and a daughter and her twin sister, Pamela has a three-month-old

baby and lives between Jamaica, London, and Cayman.

The 68-year-old matriarch of the Seaga clan, says her children are her life. They have added to the fulfilment, satisfaction and contentment in her life and she is proud of all five of them and their achievements.

Mrs. Seaga spoke briefly of her early life. She went to Boston at age 18 to attend College, but never made it as her persistent fiancé followed her, and a few months later they were married.

She recalled that life in those early days was not very easy on the young couple who after a year of marriage found themselves with a son.

They returned to Jamaica two years after their son was born and Mr. Seaga went into the import business. However, the war came along and affected the business, and so he changed to the travel agency which has been the family business for the past 30 years.

A deeply religious person, Mrs. Seaga is a Seventh-Day Adventist by denomination, and she said she tried to instill Christian values in her children, who attended church with her when they were younger.

They have each made religious decisions for themselves but Mrs. Seaga now attends the Andrews Memorial Adventist Chapel. She recently acquired a piece of equipment for the Andrews Memorial Hospital and her next project is to get a reusscillator. She admits to a love of social and welfare work and helping people.

Since the death of her husband, Mrs. Seaga lives with a close family friend. His death has created a vacuum in her life but the wounds are slowly healing as she adjusts to the loss. Had he lived, the couple would have celebrated their 52nd wedding anniversary this year.

But, Mrs. Seaga said, she has the family business to take up most of her time, and being a mother and grandmother is demanding, but fulfilling. Her hobbies are baking, cooking, reading and swimming.

Asked about her philosophy of life, she said, "One should live up to what they think and shouldn't succumb to outside influences. One should keep a straight path and have a life of your own. Have a goal and keep to it."